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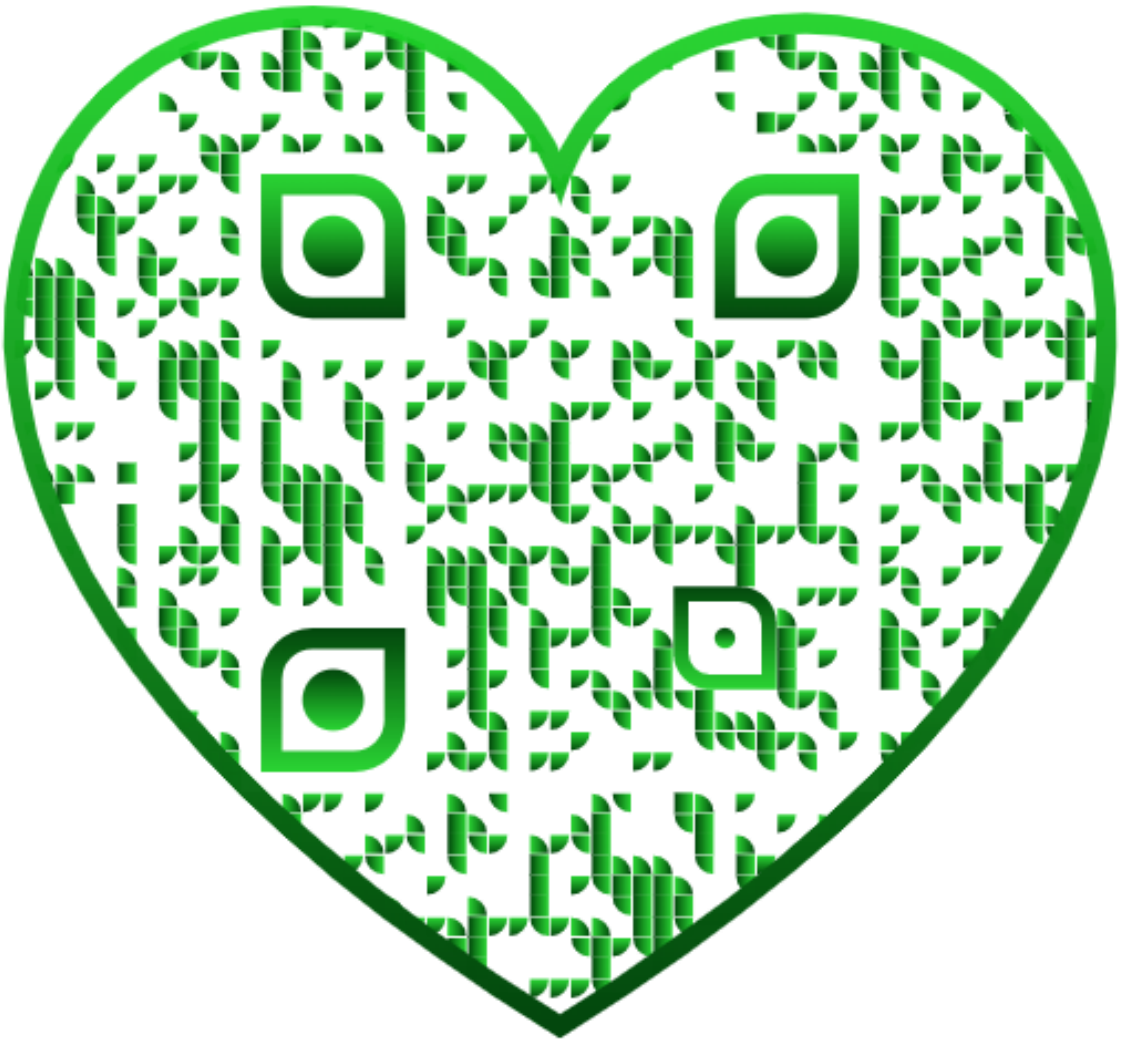

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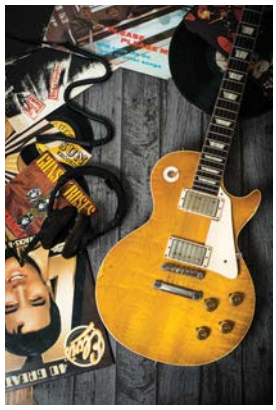
Out on the tiles

Over the coming weeks, you have two great reasons to step outside and enjoy some guitar-based thrills. On 25-26 February, the UK's biggest guitar event, The Guitar Show, returns to New Bingley Hall in Birmingham. As well as a raft of live stage artists and exhibitors, including some of the biggest names in the business, *G&B* will be presenting a series of Meet Your Maker Q&A sessions over the course of the weekend. You'll have the chance to quiz industry luminaries from the likes of Orange and Bare Knuckle directly – visit www.theguitarshow.co.uk for booking information.

As if that wasn't exciting enough, 16 March will see the first in a series of live *G&B* masterclasses take place. At London's famous Water Rats venue, virtuoso guitarist Guthrie Govan will be heading up a live two-hour masterclass and Q&A that will provide a fascinating insight into the approach of one of the most talented guitar players on the face of the planet.

Tickets are strictly limited, so head to bit.ly/guitarandbassguthrie to find out more and book your place at what promises to be a fantastic night out for guitar players of all persuasions. Hopefully I'll see you there!



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THIS MONTH'S EXPERTS...

DAVE HUNTER

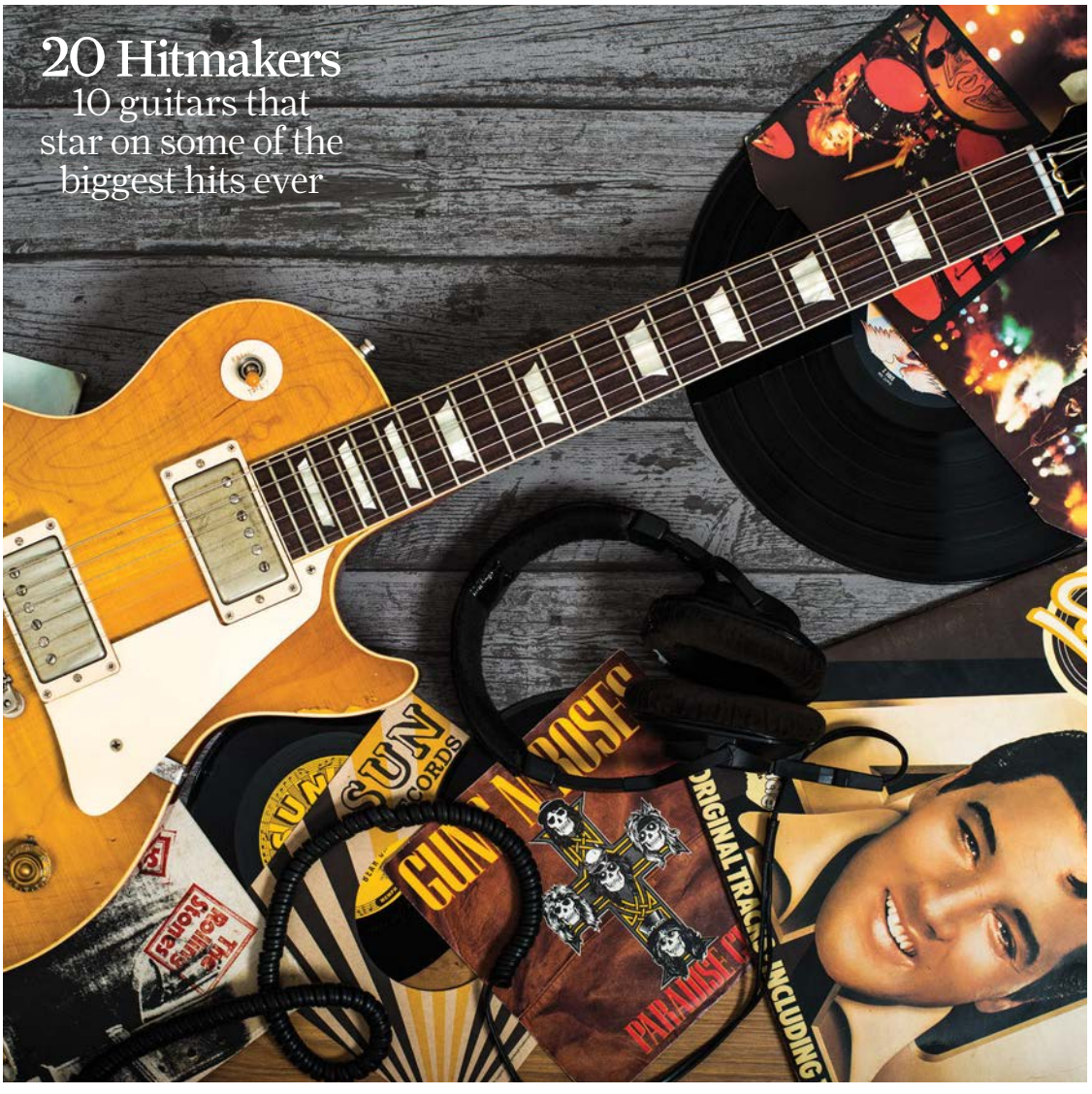
Dave Hunter is a writer and musician who has worked in the US and the UK. A former editor of this title, he is the author of *The Guitar Amp Handbook*, *Guitar Effects Pedals*, *Amped* and *The Fender Telecaster*. Check out his column on page 8.

HUW PRICE

Huw spent 16 years as a pro audio engineer, working with the likes of David Bowie, Primal Scream and NIck Cave. His book *Recording Guitar & Bass* was published in 2002, sparking a career in guitar journalism. He also builds and maintains guitars, amps and FX.

PAUL GREGORY

G&B's test pilot is the guitarist in Newcastle band Lanterns On The Lake, who are signed to the Bella Union label. When he's not on tour, Paul spends his time trawling eBay to feed his addiction to fuzz pedals and is also a mix engineer.



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Opening bars...

RICHARD JOHN 'RICK' PARFITT OBE
1948–2016

Maybe it's 'celebrity death compassion fatigue'. Maybe the shock of George Michael's untimely passing within 24 hours simply meant music news was too full. But in any other year, the death of Status Quo stalwart Rick Parfitt would surely have been more noted.

A household name and one of the UK's most-liked musicians, Parfitt was an integral part of UK legends Status Quo for 49 years, until his departure in October 2016. He died unexpectedly in Marbella, Spain, on Christmas Eve 2016 after suffering a severe infection following complications from a pre-existing shoulder injury, the result of a fall.

His partner in Status Quo, Francis Rossi, paid a heartfelt tribute, saying: "Rick was the archetypal rock star, one of the originals. He never lost his joy, his mischievous edge and his penchant for living life at high speed, high volume, high risk. His life was never boring, he was louder and faster and more carefree than the rest of us."

Status Quo mocked their self-chosen boundaries by calling a later album *In Search Of The Fourth Chord* (after The Moody Blues' portentous prog opus *In Search Of The Lost Chord*), but Quo were better musicians than they were given credit for. Parfitt had earned his living as a teenager playing covers in night-after-night cabaret: you simply can't do that if you 'can't play'.

"People try to dismiss what we do, but they can't," Parfitt once remarked. "To actually play what we play and how we play it, it's not simple. It's bloody hard work." Heavy 0.014 to 0.056-gauge strings and open G and B tunings were his friends.

With his blond locks and uptilted Tele, Parfitt was an icon. "He developed his own sound, his own style, casually inspiring a generation of players," remembers Rossi. And Rick could write, too. Quo generally co-wrote, but the heavily-Rick'd ones – *Rain*, *Forty-Five Hundred Times*, *Big Fat Mama*, *Mystery Song* – were some of the band's best. His *Living On An Island* was a rare peek at the vulnerability of a bon viveur.

> *"Rick was the archetypal rock star, one of the originals. He never lost his joy, his mischievous edge and his penchant for living life at high speed, high volume, high risk"* **FRANCIS ROSSI**

Parfitt joined Quo on the eve of début hit *Pictures Of Matchstick Men*. Like many of Quo's early tracks, it was a psych-pop oddity (though hugely loved) and, by the early 70s, Quo had stripped everything back to their love of basic rock 'n' roll.

Like the Young brothers in AC/DC, Parfitt and Rossi had defined roles in their band. And while many of Rossi's early solos were chaotic (though again, much loved – this will be a theme!), Parfitt was a rhythm guitarist of near-superhuman powers. He was as metronomic as John Coghlan's drums, lobbing chugging chords into the Frantic Four's relentless assault on the 12-bar artform. 1972 album *Piledriver*, from its title to its heads-down cover image, was the quintessence of Quo-ness. It birthed their first hit, *Paper Plane*. 1973 follow-up *Hello!* became a UK No. 1, and subsequent albums *Quo*, *On The Level* (*Down Down* was a No. 1 single) and *Blue For You* made for an unstoppable band. *Live!*, recorded in Glasgow in 1976, smashed like a Panzer firing cannonballs.

The media loved deriding Quo, but their early glory days should not be a guilty pleasure. Status Quo were a great band. John Lydon (née Rotten) compared the Ramones to Quo and eventually admitted fandom, as did Paul Weller. DJ John Peel listed *Paper Plane* as one of his top 10 singles ever.

Quo's John Fogerty cover, *Rockin' All Over The World*, meant true pop stardom, though Quo's later material arguably never scaled the heights of their earlier hits. But live, Quo remained undiminished. With Parfitt, they played more shows (over 6,000) than The Rolling Stones. They had more chart hits than The Beatles.

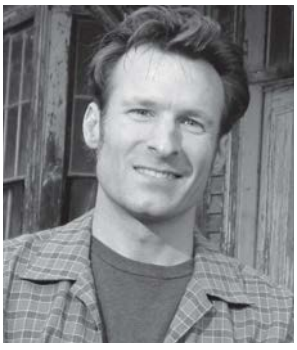
Parfitt didn't care for Rossi's decision for Quo to go acoustic and eventually departed, after previous health scares. In his final interview with *G&B* last year, he reflected: "In my heart, I'm a rocker... I'm not a great fan of the whole acoustic malarkey. It doesn't float my boat."

There were no ill feelings, though. Parfitt wished his replacement, Richie Malone, well ("It must be all of his dreams come true") and he was also planning a solo album and writing a no-doubt bawdy memoir when mortality struck.

'Top bloke', uncomplicated rocker and crushing rhythm guitarist, Rick Parfitt embodied the unembroidered fun of rock 'n' roll. He'd earned the gig many, many guitarists would love to have. Once asked what Quo's role was, he aptly replied: "If the party's flagging, put on some Quo."

Letters from America

Using the finest Californian tonewoods, Ronin Guitars has built up quite a list of celebrity fans. **DAVE HUNTER** plugs in the Stormcrow



DAVE HUNTER
Dave Hunter is a writer and musician who has worked in the US and the UK. A former editor of this title, he is the author of numerous books including *The Guitar Amp Handbook*, *Guitar Effects Pedals*, *Amped* and *The Fender Telecaster*.

Yeah, it's tough being the guys at Ronin Guitars. You need a sweet piece of thousand-year-old tonewood for a new project? Just hike out on the Reed family land in northern California and take your pick of felled old-growth redwoods. Not to belittle the skill that luthiers Izzy Lugo and John and Jack Reed put into the process, but hey, it's a pretty cool way to get the ball rolling.

For several years now, the guys at Ronin have been building a stellar reputation on the back of interesting and original designs such as this Stormcrow, their newest model. A few of their guitars have more directly traceable inspirations, but the majority boast a large portion of originality, in looks, woods used, pickups and appointments – all of it. This is the third Ronin guitar I've had the pleasure of playing; each has made a unique statement, and has done so boldly. Clearly, I'm not the only one impressed by Ronin's work, either: Phil Lesh, David Torn, Keith Urban, Oz Noy and Jimmy Vivino have taken up the cause, and these guitars from the redwood rainforests of Humboldt country seem to be establishing themselves as a primary place to turn for those seeking inspiringly outré tones.

That being said, each of the Ronins I have tried can also rock along old-school, no problem, and this Stormcrow is no exception... but I'm getting ahead of myself. Lines-wise, this guitar comes at us a little bit Gibson SG, with perhaps a smidge of Gretsch Corvette and a pinch of non-reverse Firebird in its back-angled six-a-side headstock, but the result is something entirely other. What the photos might not immediately reveal of this luscious and creative two-tone Iridescent Grey and Bimini Coral finish (in custom-mixed, un-catalysed nitrocellulose lacquer) is that the oval coral section at the lower bout is actually routed from the wood of this one-piece rosewood body. The effect, which is set off beautifully by a strip of white binding front and back, is of some bright, raw 'inner self' emerging from the darker outer shell of the guitar. Nifty – and rather beguiling.

The glued-in neck is made from korina (white limba) with a bound rosewood fingerboard inlaid with 'miniature trapezoids', a cheeky touch. The entire guitar (other than the fingerboard) has been gently hand-aged, and whichever side of the 'relic' debate you land on, personally, I feel that the light finish checking and subtle tarnish suit the Stormcrow's ethos very well.

Likely also to be beguiling to many readers are those overly large pickups. They are, in fact, Ronin's next-generation Foilbucker SCII, humbuckers made in the sonic image of the old DeArmond gold foil single coils of

The Stormcrow is a righteously cool guitar offering a refreshingly minty basket of tricks

KEY FEATURES

Ronin Stormcrow

- **PRICE** Starting at $7,500 (plus shipping and any duties)
- **CONTACT** Roninguitars.com info@roninguitars.com
- **BODY** Single-piece master-grade old-growth redwood
- **NECK** Glued-in korina neck, full-C profile
- **FINGERBOARD** Rosewood, 12" radius, 24.5" scale length
- **FRETS** 22 medium nickel-silver
- **NUT** Hand-shaped bone
- **PICKUPS** 2x Ronin Foilbucker SCII
- **ELECTRONICS** Individual volume and tone controls for each pickup, three-way switch, NOS vintage paper-in-oil tone caps
- **FINISH** Two-tone Iridescent Grey and Bimini Coral in custom-mixed un-catalysed nitrocellulose lacquer
- **HARDWARE** Hipshot open-back tuners, Pigtail aluminum tune-o-matic bridge and stopbar tailpiece
- **STRINGS** Ernie Ball .010–.046

the 60s, a pickup that this maker has long favoured. They exude a quirky class in their custom stainless-steel covers with gold foil inserts, and Ronin's John Reed tells me they were voiced specifically for this set-neck, 24.5-inch scaled guitar with ABR-1 bridge. "The sound field is tighter and more powerful than our previous Foilbucker," Reed adds, "but with exceptional clarity and nuance. These will have a stronger fundamental and more output."

In reverse

The pickups are routed through a four-knob control section with a three-way switch, which is fairly traditional other than in its reversal of the positioning of each pickup's controls; the thinking being, apparently, that you're more likely to ride the bridge pickup's volume knob while soloing, so that's the one placed nearest your little finger (and what groovy old-style radio knobs they are!). The CTS tone pots carry NOS vintage paper-in-oil tone caps, while the CTS volume pots are wired with treble-bleed networks to keep the tone crisp as you wind them down. The remaining hardware is quality stuff, and includes a Pigtail aluminum ABR-1 (aka tune-o-matic) bridge and stopbar tailpiece combo, and open-back Hipshot tuners.

The neck reveals itself in the hand to be a formidable creation. I like it. The rounded-C profile is beefy and full, a very mid-50s Gibson feel that lends weight to what is otherwise quite a light guitar. This results in just a little bit of neck dive when playing seated, but not so much that it's any kind of nuisance. In any case, the guitar plays superbly, and the smoothly sculpted neck heel is a real pleasure to encounter.

Unplugged, the Stormcrow is resonant and lively, with a woody richness at its core and plentiful vibrations running right through the entire construction and into your sternum as you lean into it. A good start.

Storm in heaven

Plugged in alternately through a custom JTM45-style head and 2x12 cab with Celestion G12-65s, and an EL84-equipped Dr. Z DB4 combo with a Celestion Gold, the Stormcrow revealed chameleon-like capabilities that made it a lot of fun to spend time with.

Dive into any standard classic-rock inspired antics that you might expect a set-neck, dual-humbucker, mahogany-bodied guitar to tackle and the Stormcrow acquits itself very well. There's enough power in these humbuckers to get a pushed amp grinding, and great sustain from the guitar itself. The Foilbucker-and-redwood combination most definitely has something all of its own going on, though, and that uniqueness of the voice inspires you to explore beyond the usual boundaries.

These pickups yield great clarity and crispness, yet with a thickness and body that you don't usually associate with 'clear, crisp' humbuckers. That, and they deliver the elusive combination of edgy attack and toothsome compression that has won so many fans for the original 60s single-coil gold foils. Through clean settings, they deliver equally luscious jazz or country moods, both with a certain high fidelity that should not be equated with 'cold' or 'sterile'.

Give them some overdrive, though – whether by cranking either of the amps or adding, for example, an Xotic BB Preamp to the chain – and they gush a raw, gnarly and utterly enjoyable voice that's beautifully at home with alt-rock and grunge-blues alike. Fuzz? Oh yeah, they are utterly hairy yet never entirely out of control through a Blackout Effectors Musket in ways that few traditional pickup designs can manage – and right at home in more ambient noisescape excursions.

All in all, the Stormcrow is a righteously cool guitar offering a refreshingly minty basket of tricks, and although it's not cheap (especially with the exchange rate at the time of writing), it's definitely one to explore if you're looking for something inspiringly retro-original, both in sound and in looks.

READER BOARDS

St Louis, Missouri guitarist **CHAD GRIMM** is part of experimental rock act the Love Brothers Band. His two-amp set-up calls for a versatile pedalboard. He tells us what he's using...

KIT LIST

Chad Grimm

- **PEDALS IN ORDER**
  Thomas International Cry Baby, Boss TU-2 Chromatic Tuner, Earthquaker Devices Hoof fuzz, JHS Unicorn, Walrus Audio Iron Horse, J Rockett The Dude, J Rockett Chicken Soup, J Rockett Tim Pierce Overdrive, Empress Tape Delay, Signal-Flex SF-AB, Strymon Flint, Boss RC-20XL Loop Station, Marshall GV-2 Guv'nor, Roger Mayer Octavia, LovePedal Hermida Audio Zendrive, J Rockett Archer
- **PATCH CABLES**
  Lava Cable Mini kit, George L kit, Live Wire and various others
- **POWER SUPPLY**
  SKB and One Spot
- **BOARD TYPE**
  SKB PS-45
- **HEAR IT HERE**
  Soundcloud.com/chadwickgrimm

What inspired this set-up?
"I play in an experimental rock band – think Zappa – where anything can happen at any moment, and I wanted to get the most out of my gear. I also use this rig at home for coming up with song ideas, chord progressions, and practising scales. After the tape delay, the A side goes to the looper and out to a Fender clean tone. The B side goes to the Flint and out to a Marshall overdrive tone. This way, I can switch to any tone at any time during the song, and even loop something if needed and play on top of that. I also have several other pedals that can be added before or after the board for extra depth. The pedalboard also has a built-in effects loop, which is quite handy."

Tell us a little about the journey...
"It started piece by piece. The A/B came in pretty early, and I would always use two amps. Pedals came and went, and by trial and error I found what worked for me and my style. As my needs changed over the years, I needed organisation and something I could travel with – and the SKB is perfect for that."

Is there a pedal you'd like to add?
"At this point, I'm only fine-tuning. I'm looking at a Fulltone Octafuzz OF-2, Strymon TimeLine, and maybe an Xotic BB preamp. I'd like to start using the amps' natural overdrive and become less dependent on OD pedals. I'm having a Rockitt Retro 50 built by my friend Kevin here in St Louis. I plan on using only one pedal, a Strymon El Capistan, in the effects loop and only the amp for drive, due to its PPIMV."

What guitars and amps do you use with this board?
"I mostly play Gibson VOS Reissue Les Pauls. I have several guitars from the '56 through '60 era. I also have an ES-335, Junior, SG and my favourite – a TV Yellow Special. I'm a big fan of P-90s. Of course, I can't forget the Fender Strat and Tele. The A side is my '64 Fender Vibrolux. At times, I use a '66 Princeton or Dr. Z Maz 38. The B side rotates between a '77 Marshall 1987x model, an '87 Silver Jubilee and a Naylor SD60, which is a very underrated amp. It's a lot, but I can get any tone at any time."

What lessons have you learned along the way?
"I think it is important to learn the order of your pedals to get the best tone. My favourite sound is the fuzz before the OD, and used together. Or you could use an Octafuzz sound for a nice raw tone. I also prefer my delay at the end of the chain or in the effects loops. Also, when using two amps, you can use them in stereo, or what I like to do is use the Flint's slow tremolo on the B side so only one side has modulation and the guitar sounds like it's swirling around the room. Finally, two amps are always better than one. When playing live, you always have a backup amp if one decides to fail – and when used together the sound can be guitar heaven."

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TEST PILOTS
FENDER HOT ROD DEVILLE ML

Lanterns On The Lake guitarist **PAUL GREGORY** takes the Fender Hot Rod DeVille ML 212 on a 10-date UK tour to find out whether it's the one...

Paul Gregory

- **TEST INSTRUMENT** Fender DeVille ML 212
- **PRICE** £959
- **BAND** Lanterns On The Lake
- **MAIN GUITARS & PEDALS USED** Eastwood Airline '59 Coronado, modded Epiphone Dot, Epiphone Les Paul, Maxon OD-9, Way Huge Green Rhino, Fredric Effects Green Russian, Fulltone '69 MkII, Z.Vex Super Hard On, DigiTech DigiVerb, DigiTech DigiDelay, EarthQuaker Devices Avalanche Run, Line 6 DL4
- **GIGS SO FAR** Bristol Colston Hall, Islington Assembly Hall, The Cookie Leicester, Open Norwich, Portland Arms Cambridge, The Bullingdon Oxford, The Crescent York, The Caves Edinburgh, Brewery Arts Centre Kendal, Mining Institute Newcastle

After testing out a pair of Fender amps – a Bassbreaker 18/30 and a Hot Rod DeVille ML 212 – in rehearsals for Lanterns On The Lake's UK tour, I'd decided the DeVille was the one I wanted to take on the road, and it hasn't disappointed.

The DeVille came on our 10-date run, nestled in the back of a rather fetching splitter van with all our other gear. As amps go, it's the perfect size for such manoeuvres, and stowed in the back it sat still and didn't move about. It's also a lot lighter than it looks, and the handle Fender puts on the Hot Rod series amps is something to behold in itself – a very comfortable grip that makes lugging this DeVille around easier than most amps I've toured with.

As with all the Hot Rods, the DeVille ML is built solidly. The shell is covered in a thick vinyl, which is very tour-friendly, and it comes with the usual black Fender amp cover. I did wince a little when we first put it in the van – loading a brand new amp (especially one that's on loan from Fender) into a tour van without either a flightcase or a padded cover is usually a sure-fire way of giving it some lovely dents and scrapes.

Rehearsing in an untreated, lively practice room where everything is loud and furious – the sound bouncing and rattling off the walls and the carpet shaking – is, of course, entirely different from setting up on stage and playing through a big PA system. Often during rehearsals I'm convinced something sounds like the cat's pyjamas, only to then find on stage that it actually sounds utterly abhorrent. I'm not entirely sure why this is, but no doubt it's something to do with physics... or the science of acoustics... or something else that ends in 'ics'. Whatever it is, I have no interest in the science, I just like things to behave on stage. So I was very interested to see how the DeVille ML would perform.

Its first gig was at The Lantern, at Colston Hall in Bristol. The venue has a really nice open stage – quite large – and the room is long. We set about getting our gear set up and I let the amp warm up a bit while we got our bearings. Switching the standby off and strumming out a few chords, the DeVille sounded as wonderful as I'd remembered in rehearsals – clean, clear and loving all of my pedals as if they were its children. Blasting through the soundcheck, it was such an easy amp to get on with on stage – the volume taper is very good indeed. As always, it was too loud on stage to begin with. I used to have an older Hot Rod Deluxe II, and I remember the constant desire to turn it down, but on that amp there was no turning down – it was either 'as loud as hell' or 'off'.

"The DeVille ML is a serious pedal platform. I've never come across anything quite like it"

I found it easy to get the DeVille ML sounding perfect volume-wise, and the taper is smooth with a nice gradual increase in volume. Speaking of volume, this amp has two separate volume controls, which are both voiced identically – the idea perhaps being that you can set two different volumes for different guitars and such like, or use one as a boost (volume 2 has a clean boost on it). At first, I didn't really know what to do with this; I don't use any volume boosts on my pedalboard, it's just clean, overdrive (louder) and then fuzz (louder still). Chris, our new genius front-of-house engineer, takes care of any out-front volume pushes, so I didn't think this feature would be of any use to me.

During soundcheck, however, I found myself flicking between volume one and two while playing the songs, and then using that to work out the correct stage volume. Now I can't believe all amps don't have this feature. It may not be the way it was intended to be used, but it certainly worked for me!

During the Bristol gig, I could really feel the DeVille ML doing its thing – it's a serious pedal platform. I've never come across anything quite like it, and it just made everything sound... 'better'. That may seem a lazy description, but it's true. All my pedals sounded as if they'd been given an upgrade, and the 3D depth in reverbs and delays is very noticeable – you can really 'feel' the sound. The EQ is great for getting things loud and removing anything too overbearing. Chris and I found it sounded best with the treble and bass at around 12 o'clock and the mids reined in a little at around 9 o'clock; this gave Chris a good base to EQ out front if need be.

I don't want to spend my time on stage worrying about what my guitar sounds like, I just want to play. Pleasingly, the DeVille ML allowed me to do that – there's no harshness, no flabbing about in the low end and the projection is super-good. I could hear what I was playing clearly and it sounded great! >

The Fender DeVille ML 212 ready for action on the opening night of Lanterns On The Lake's UK tour, at Bristol's Colston Hall

The second gig was the following night at Islington Assembly Hall in London. For this show, we'd recruited five extra players to accompany us on brass and strings, but the stage was massive so there was plenty of room. Again, soundchecking the amp was a breeze – the two-volume thing worked a treat and we kept the EQ the same as the previous night.

During the gig, the amp was again a joy to play. Islington Assembly Hall is quite a large room and my position on stage was quite near the left front-of-house speakers. I could hear the band in the room and the guitar seemed to really find its own place in the mix. The only thing that caught my ear was my Fulltone '69 MkII fuzz felt a little underpowered at times during the show. I thought I had felt this in Bristol, but wasn't completely sure. However, in London there was again something not quite right. It's a germanium fuzz, so it's sensitive to temperature – and stages tend to be pretty hot during a gig – but the '69 has always been quite stable compared to other germanium fuzzes I've used. I'd never noticed this with other amps – including the cleanest of Fenders.

Maybe the DeVille ML is so sensitive to pedals it brings out subtle things that would otherwise go unnoticed. Who knows?! I definitely felt it. It wasn't that the Fulltone didn't sound good – it sounded great, and it's my favourite germanium fuzz by a long way – but it felt as if it had a little less gain than I'm used to. It was fine for the most part, but some of the songs required just a little more.

For the third gig, in Leicester, I swapped out the Fulltone for a newly acquired fuzz of the Big Muff type – a Fredric Effects Green Russian, a pedal I'd 'accidentally' bought from the Fredric Effects eBay shop a few weeks prior to the tour. On stage, the combination of the DeVille and a Muff-type was glorious and gave me exactly the fuzzy sound I was after – a huge thick noise with plenty of bloom and grit. The Green Russian also had just the right amount of mids to combine with the amp.

With some amps, I find using fuzz pedals can be a tricky – as soon as the fuzz is on, your guitar disappears behind the rest of the band, especially with some Fender amps due to the way the midrange works.

"The changes made to the DeVille ML have resulted in the most pleasing touring amp I've used"

Fortunately, I found the opposite to be true here. When the fuzz was on, it was most definitely on – front and centre, ripping the Universe to bits, as fuzz pedals are supposed to do.

The tour continued, and every night the Fender gave me exactly what I needed. It responded to my playing in a really intuitive way, sensitive to pick attack and the subtleties of quiet passages, and I could really coax out the ebb and flow of the music. When smashed with the full force of the heavier parts of our set, it just exploded into life, and at no point did I feel as if I was getting lost in the mix of the band or overpowering anything.

This is probably reading like a review filled entirely with glowing positives. I hear you cry, 'Where's the balance?'. Well, the truth is I don't have anything negative to say about this amp. The original DeVille is an amp I don't get on with. I've tried it numerous times and each time I've failed to make it work for me. This is, of course, still a DeVille, but the changes made to it: the speaker, the upgrades to the clean channel, the removal of the master volume and whatever else Fender and Michael Landau did have resulted in an amp that I can truly say is the most pleasing touring amp I've used. If you use pedals to shape your tone, and you want the classic Fender clean sound, this is without doubt the amp to try first.

The final gig of the tour was a sold-out show up north in our native Newcastle. It was a little sad that it was the last one, but I was very pleased with how things had gone. When your guitar sounds good to you, and you're confident the noises you're producing with your set-up are the ones you'd imagined, it makes playing live the amazing experience it's supposed to be. After the final unloading of the gear back at our rehearsal room, I checked the amp... no scratches.

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SOUNDTRACK OF MY LIFE

Jeremy Widerman

Monster Truck guitarist picks 10 gems from his record collection

Canadian rock band Monster Truck return to the UK for a string of dates in March with a reputation for ferocious live performances, having previously opened for the likes of Guns N' Roses, Alice In Chains and ZZ Top. The band's 2013 debut *Furiosity* earned them a Juno Award in their homeland for Best Breakthrough Group and they released follow-up *Sittin' Heavy* last year. *See www.ilovemonstertruck for full tour dates and ticket information.*

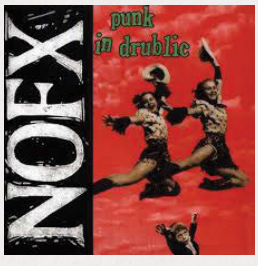
Nirvana
NEVERMIND

"I feel like a dick talking about this record because everything that could ever be said about it has already been said by people who are smarter and more successful than me! Ha! However, it was the first album that made me want to pick up a guitar – and I did just that. It kickstarted my whole existence as a musician, end of story."

Grand Funk Railroad
CLOSER TO HOME

"There's lots to say about this album. It's underrated and underappreciated these days behind bands like Led Zeppelin and Black Sabbath in the realm of riff rock. At one point they were the biggest arena rock band in the world, and if you listen to this album you'll understand why. It oozes with groove and attitude in a way that hadn't been seen upon its release."

NOFX
PUNK IN DRUBLIC



"I bought this album when I was 15 because of the album artwork and because I knew it had double-time beats all over it. At the time, I had aspirations to play punk-rock music and someone had mentioned to me that I needed to listen to NOFX. They were right and this is one of the best punk-rock records in the history of 90s So-Cal punk rock."

Soundgarden
SUPERUNKNOWN

"I didn't realise how much of an impact this album had on me until recently. I had forgotten about it until the new *Doom* game got released this year. It sounds weird, but I listened to *Superunknown* repeatedly while I played *Doom 2* as a kid. It crept into my subconscious in a very weird way, and I realised when the remake came out this year something was missing – Soundgarden."

The Black Keys
MAGIC POTION

"I don't like The Black Keys. In the history of bands that were unbelievable then went down the toilet they are almost top of the heap. *Magic Potion* was perfect to me. It inspired me to change my guitar playing and embrace a more simplistic, blues-oriented approach. I wouldn't be so hard on them if they didn't repeatedly mention how they dislike this album and never play songs off it."

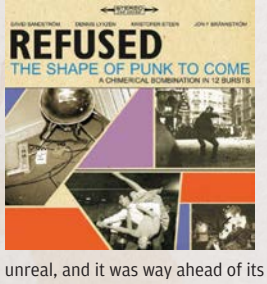
In Flames
COLONY

"My favourite metal record – granted I don't listen to a ton of metal. There's something about this album that is quite different than any of their material before it or after... an almost pop sensibility, probably part of the reason it's the only In Flames record I listen to! Just a brilliant combination of melody and crushing metal riffs. Great clean tones for the lower dynamic parts, too!"

Rage Against The Machine
THE BATTLE OF LOS ANGELES

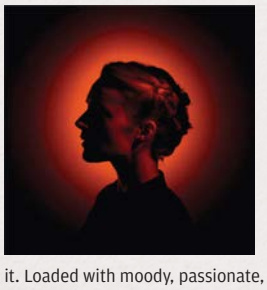
"I think you could put any Rage Against The Machine record in this selection, I just go to *The Battle of Los Angeles* more often than all of the others. It's just a perfect-sounding album, just an absolutely amazing combination of complementary tones with stellar songwriting and lyrics. I'd say it's one of the of the best heavy albums ever made."

Refused
THE SHAPE OF PUNK TO COME



"Who names their record that? Balls of steel. As far as production goes, it doesn't get much better. Any time anyone asks what a snare should sound like, it's this. Always this. In fact, every tone on the record is unreal, and it was way ahead of its time stylistically. The fact they knew that and put it right there on the cover is impressive, and it will surely stand the test of time."

Agnes Obel
AVENTINE



"I'm going off the beaten track with this one. Whenever I'm not in a loud and aggressive mood, I go to this album. It honestly may be my favourite album of all time, as far as how often and constantly I listen to it. Loaded with moody, passionate, soulful and chilling songs, this album always gives me the feels whenever I'm in need."

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HITMAKER$

We all know the songs, and the guitarists who played on them, but what of the sacred instruments they used? *G&B* tracks down 10 guitars that star on some of the biggest hits of our time...

Story **Michael Stephens**

"Every guitar has a song in it." So said Neil Young. Or perhaps it was Jackson Browne. Or was it Keith Richards? Anyway, you get the picture. But what of those superstar guitar songwriters and sessioneers over the years? Are their guitars truly full of intangible mojo and magic? Are they positively brimming with songs? To we mere mortals, it certainly seems so, but those instruments are also something of a motley mix: valuable vintage beauties, battered roadworn warhorses, handmade one-offs and quirkily modded mongrels have all become hallowed treasures instrumental in the historic creation of the über-hit.

Join *G&B* as we look at 10 stars and the guitars they used to create the soundtrack to our lives. 10 instruments that made hits and buckets of cash – even if the performers didn't always see it... >

GUN'N'ROSES
ORIGINAL TRACK

© Michael Garland

TOMMY TEDESCO

1960S 'STRADIVARIUS' FENDER TELECASTER

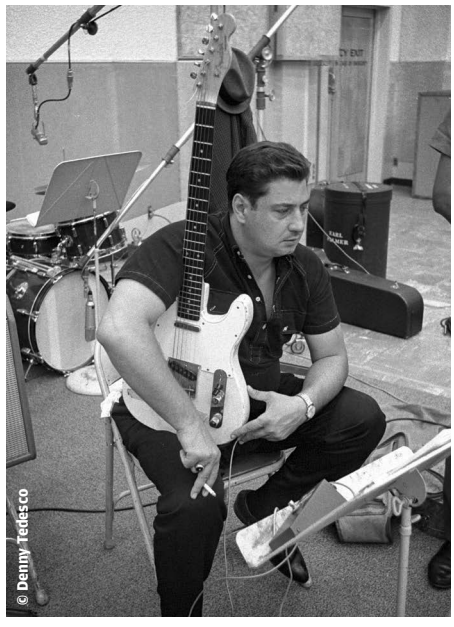
What is it? Battered Tele used by sessioneer extraordinaire in LA studio pack The Wrecking Crew. Although Tedesco played whatever guitar fitted the songs, this Tele was his go-to favourite.

Anything special? Tele experts generally agree Tedesco's is a pre-'L' series 'slab board' Tele, given it has the less translucent blonde finish, while the wide-distance 12th-fret dots make it no later than mid-63. It's all pretty standard, but this workhorse is battered and scratched to death. Tedesco was a heavy smoker and used to stub out butts on the body between takes. Its last session was for The Monkees' Michael Nesmith, who asked the Crew to "just go crazy" at the end of a song... so Tedesco launched his Tele across the studio! The debris was signed by James Burton, Hal Blaine, Earl Palmer and other Wrecking Crew members.

Signature sounds TT didn't really have 'a sound', except on his solo jazz records. He was still dubbed the 'most recorded guitarist in history', due to his work for The Beach Boys, Elvis, The Monkees, The Byrds, Phil Spector, Frank Sinatra, Sonny and Cher, The Mamas & The Papas and Frank Zappa. He also played on the themes for *Bonanza, The Twilight Zone, M*A*S*H, Starsky & Hutch, Kojak, Batman, The Godfather, Jaws, Mission: Impossible, The French Connection, The Deer Hunter* and *Indiana Jones And The Temple of Doom*.

Similar retail buy Fender American Vintage '64 Telecaster (£1,579).

Tommy said Tedesco's *Confessions Of A Guitar Player* is a great read, full of funny tales and hardball philosophy: "Practise is a word I don't use. I use play. If you play, you get better." >


© Denny Tedesco

Tedesco in the studio with Sammy Davis Jr, using his number one guitar

© Denny Tedesco

SCOTTY MOORE
1952 GIBSON ES-295

What is it? A gold-finish ES-295 (upmarket ES-175) that Moore bought in 1953, the year before he and a young Elvis Presley were joined together in Sun Studio.

Anything special? Gibson built only 1,770 ES-295s back then, so it was pretty rare. Moore played other Gibsons with Elvis – after the ES-295, he moved onto a Super 400 and an L-5 CESN – but his first was used to drop rock 'n' roll bombs such as *That's All Right* and *Good Rockin' Tonight*. After buying it from Houck's Piano Store in Memphis, Moore modified it with a Melita Synchro-Sonic with adjustable saddles to allow better intonation. This meant a new trapeze tailpiece, too; he chose a Kluson, as used on Gibson's ES-125. "I dearly love the hollowbody sound," Moore later recalled. "To me, that's the sound of jazz – and rock and roll. To me, a hollowbody is the sound of wood making music. A solidbody is the sound of an amp..."

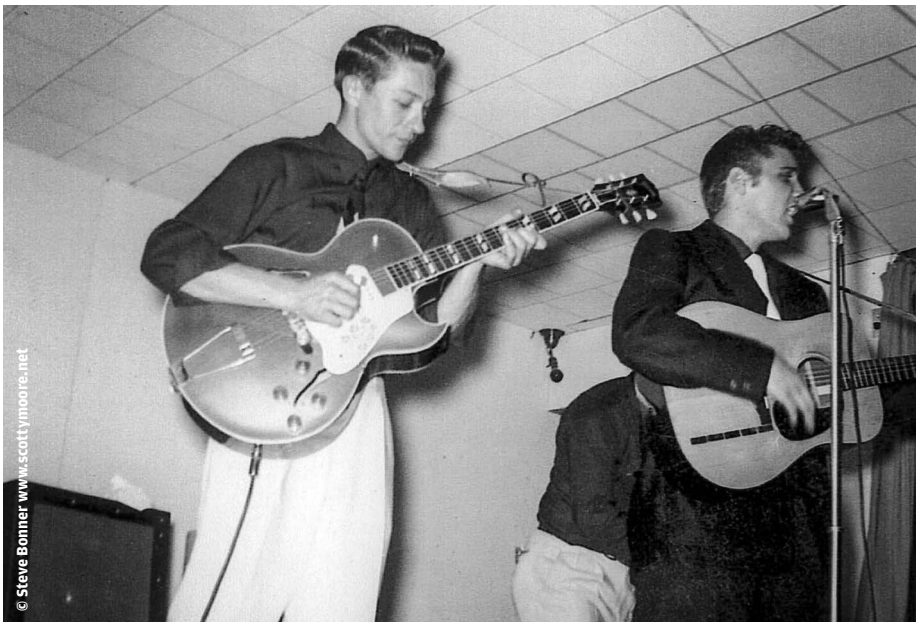
Brian Setzer calls the Gibson ES-295 "the ultimate rockabilly guitar".

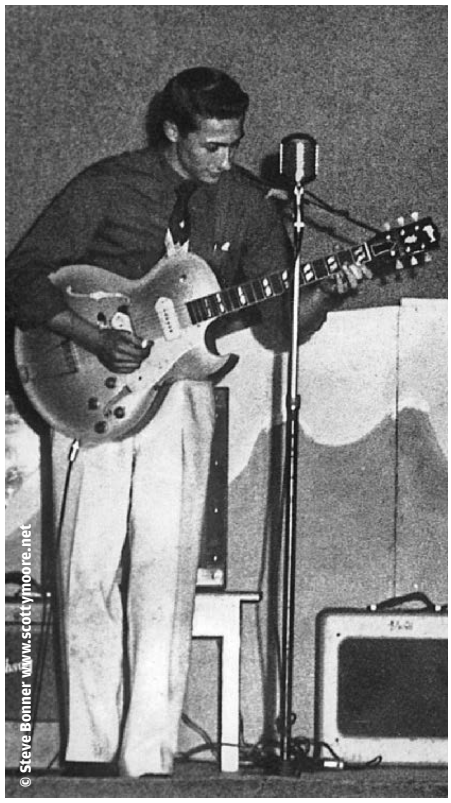
An aside It was Les Paul who initiated a gold Gibson archtop. Les and Mary Ford had played a show for WWII vets in the early 50s, and Les later recalled: "One vet, Dean Davis, had his head all bandaged up from a brain tumour operation, and he was propped up so he could see us. He said, 'I am a guitar player, but I'll never play again because I am paralysed down one side of my body'. Les reassured Davis how he'd re-learned to play with just one arm, after breaking his own. After requesting Les play him a song – *Just One More Chance* – Davis started crying. "I told him that I would have a guitar made for him, any kind he liked," Les recounted. "He said he would like a golden archtop." Les made it happen, despite Gibson's bemusement. Sadly, Davis died soon after and never got to see the golden ES-175. But gold remained Les's choice for 1952's Les Paul solidbody and the ES-295.

Signature sounds With two pickups (unlike the single P-90 ES-175), Moore added extra punch to early Elvis – check the first four King singles and *The Sun Sessions* album for pioneering twang.

Similar retail buy The Gibson Memphis ES-295 Scotty Moore was released in 2013, but is now sadly discontinued.

Moore said "That ES-295 enhanced Elvis's voice better than anything else I could have used." To his delight, Moore was eventually reunited with his original ES-295 in 2007. >





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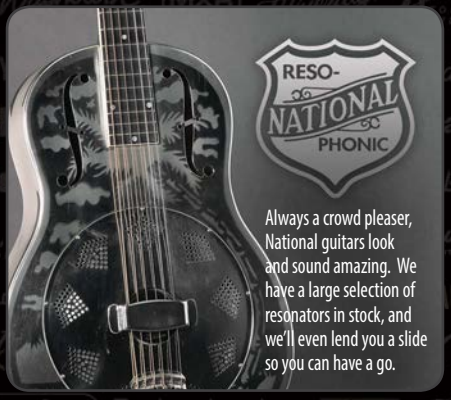

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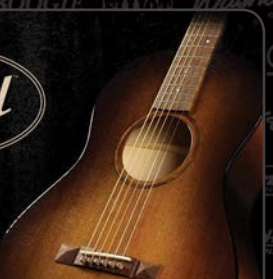

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BRIAN MAY
RED SPECIAL

What is it? You know! This homemade 1963-65 electric has graced Queen's estimated 200-250 million worldwide album sales. Although almost universally known as The Red Special, Brian calls it "the old girl".

Anything special? Of course! After learning to play banjolele, young Brian's teenage dream was an instrument that could "talk" to him and "feed back in a good way", as per Jeff Beck. His father Harold, an electrical engineer who worked on Concorde's landing system, helped Brian make it happen. "It took two years and was all done with hand tools, using any materials we could lay our hands on," May says. "The neck was part of an old fireplace. We hand-carved the inlay on the frets out of old mother-of-pearl buttons and the tremolo arm was made from a bicycle saddlebag holder, topped off with the tip of one of my mum's knitting needles." May fitted it with Burns Tri-Sonic pickups but re-wound them with reverse-wound/reverse-polarity and potted the coils.

Its scale length is 24 inches – neither Gibson nor Fender length. May worked out the correct fret placements via a 60s mainframe computer "with an overall capacity of about a thousandth of your laptop. The calculations were correct to 24 decimal places. Really! I have the printout somewhere."

Over the years, authorised replicas have been built by John Birch, Greg Fryer, Andrew Guyton, Burns, Guild and, now, Brian May Guitars. It has its own book, co-written by May and *G&B* contributor Simon Bradley, its own Wikipedia page and, on tour it has even been under armed guard. Rock memorabilia auctioneers Cooper Owen say that it's "impossible" to value such a unique guitar.

Uniquely Brian it may be, but Teenage Fanclub's Raymond McGinley used an authorised Guild RS copy (but with DiMarzio pickups) to record much of 1995's *Grand Prix* album. "I couldn't resist it. I thought, 'No one else is gonna have the courage to play one of these on stage!' I had to go for it."

Signature sounds With all its switching, it boasts 27 basic tones – think Strat or Les Paul and beyond. *Killer Queen*, with one of Brian's favourite solos, sums it up.

Similar retail buy Brian May Guitars will rock you – the BMG Special is £649, the more authentic BMG Super is £2,950.

Brian says "Most people's tone is actually in their fingers. I was quite shocked when I played with Hank Marvin. I always thought his tone was all about his guitar. He picked up my guitar and immediately it sounded like Hank Marvin... it's what's in the fingers, the spirit and the mind. I probably sound like me on any rig."

KEITH RICHARDS
1959 GIBSON LES PAUL

What is it? From the Gibson Les Paul Standard 'Holy Grail' sunburst years (1958-1960). It was bought stock-new (serial number 93182) at Farmer's Music Store in Luton by John Bowen of Mike Dean And The Kinsmen in March 1961; Bowen had Selmer Music in London retro-fit a Bigsby before he traded it in for a Gretsch Country Gentleman. Enter Keith.

Anything special? Its impact. Burst spotters will know it from The Rolling Stones' US tours of 1964. It caught millions of eyes when the Stones controversially debuted on that year's *Ed Sullivan Show* appearance, and featured on many '64-66 Stones hits live: *Little Red Rooster*, *Time Is On My Side*, *The Last Time*, *Get Off Of My Cloud*, *Let's Spend The Night Together* and more. It was Keith's main guitar on the '64/65 RCA and Chess sessions. Most famously, it was used on *(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction*, although Andy Babiuk's *Rolling Stones Gear* book documents the main fuzz riff, aided by a newly-gifted Gibson Maestro pedal, as being Richards' Gibson Firebird VII.

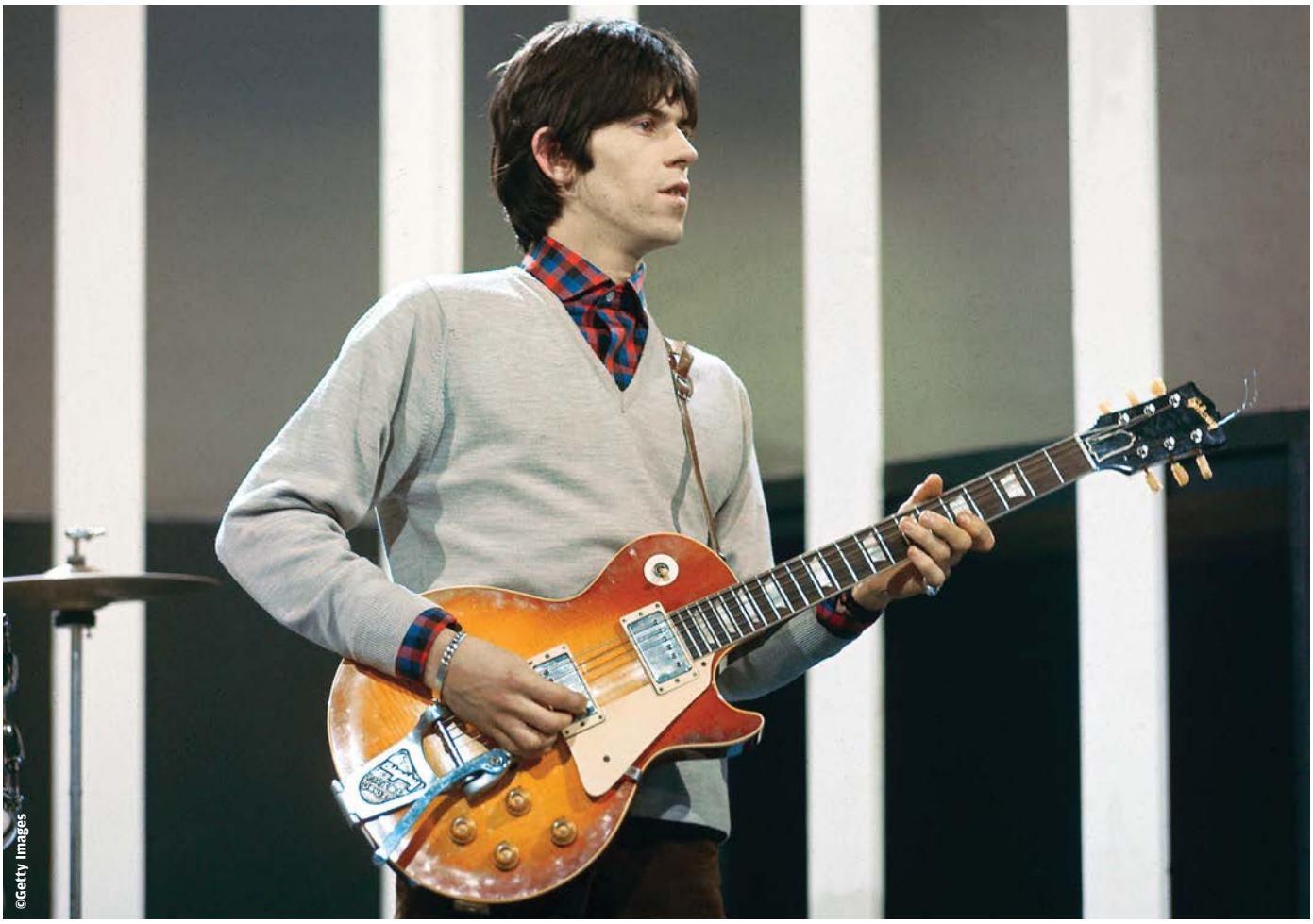
For a time, the guitar was passed around. Jimmy Page was pictured with it at a mid-60s recording session, and Eric Clapton borrowed it in 1966 to play with Cream at the Windsor Jazz & Blues Festival. Richards sold it in 1967 to future Stone Mick Taylor, when Taylor had replaced Peter Green (who in turn had replaced Eric Clapton) in John Mayall's Bluesbreakers. When Taylor made his live debut with the Stones at the Hyde Park concert in July 1969, after the death of Brian Jones, he used it to play *No Expectations* and *Love In Vain*. This guitar has history to go...

Rumour has it that the guitar was stolen in 1971, either from London or Nellcôte in southern France during the recording of *Exile On Main St*. Where is it now? It was auctioned in 2004, and sold in 2006 to an unnamed producer/collector in Sweden for a rumoured price of over $1 million.

Signature sounds *Satisfaction*... though exactly how much is debatable, and the Maestro was really the sound. Doesn't matter. Of all legendary Bursts, Keith's was the first.

Similar retail buy An original '59, even if untouched by Keef's skull rings, will be easily six figures, as only 643 were made. Close-ish is Gibson's Collector's Choice #14 1960 Les Paul, a faded Bigsby-equipped repro of session ace Waddy Wachtel's own LP, for $7,000.

Keith says "It was my first touch with a really great, classic rock 'n' roll electric guitar... I fell in love with them for a while." >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JOHN LENNON
'HAMBURG' RICKENBACKER 325

What is it? The toppermost of the poppermost of all Beatles six-strings, bought with a natural finish in Hamburg (1960) and modded/repainted in black to eventually shine brilliantly on *The Ed Sullivan Show* (1964).

Anything special? The Rickenbacker 325 is relatively unusual per se. It's semi-hollow but with no f-holes; its scale length is just 20.75 inches with 21 frets; the neck pickup mounting touches the end of the fingerboard of the glued-in neck. Why such a diminutive guitar? Lennon claimed (*16* magazine, 1964) to be "just under six feet tall" although was closer to 5' 10": even so, he wasn't particularly short. But in his black Beatle suit and Cuban heels, the raised-high 325 looked tight and tidy for Lennon's wide-legged stage stance. As for the guitar? Lennon had seen Jean 'Toots' Thielemans of George Shearing's Quintet playing a 325 as early as 1958. John bought it in Hamburg in 1960 on a shopping foray with George Harrison, who bought a Gibson amp. George later recalled, "I think we bought them on 'a knocker'. One pound down and the rest when they catch you... I don't know if we ever paid them off, but..."

Lennon's 325, one of eight natural-finish 325 models made in 1958 with two volume/two tone controls, also underwent numerous mods: control knobs (originals, oven knobs, Hofner types, Burns), vibrato (Kauffman vibrola, then Bigsby with bow-tie bridge), gold pickguard, disconnected middle pickup (rumour, and possibly just unintentional damage) and, of course, a glossy black re-fin.

The 325 in natural is last portrayed in a Cavern rehearsal photo in October 1962. The first photo of Lennon with the 325 in black finish was in December 1962 at their last performance at Hamburg's Star Club, so it was re-finished in-between, in Tekaloid coach paint. Its final major outing was at Carnegie Hall in December '64. If only as a visual totem, Lennon's black 325 is Beatlemania. In 1972, Lennon had it 'unfinished' back to natural wood and it's rumoured to have been played on final album *Double Fantasy* (1980). The guitar is still owned by the family.

John Lennon with his Rickenbacker 325, complete with glossy black refinish

©Getty Images

Signature sounds The natural/black 325 is on studio cuts up to *With The Beatles* (though more often on those it's Lennon's Gibson J-160E acoustic). For early Beatles Ric-spank, listen to *I Want To Hold Your Hand* or (rare Lennon solo) *You Can't Do That*.

Similar retail buy Rickenbacker has discontinued its replica 325C58. It now builds only a 325C64 (circa £3,300), known as the Lennon Miami. But, as well as Vox amps, flatwound strings are also an essential part of the pre-'66 Beatles tone. Thomastik-Infeld Jazz Swing Series are Fabwatchers' wires of choice.

HE SAID, HE SAID: *"I have a definite style of playing. I've always had. But I was overshadowed. They call George the invisible singer. I'm the invisible guitarist." (1971)*

SLASH
KRIS DERRIG LES PAUL REPLICA

What is it? Famously, the replica of a Les Paul that Slash used to record *Appetite For Destruction* – every Slash fan knows it wasn't an original Gibson Les Paul. But the Derrig 'Les Paul' entered the picture late in the game. Slash explained: "I was really broke and I hocked all my decent guitars before we went into the studio to make *Appetite For Destruction*. All I had left were a BC Rich Warlock and two Jackson guitars, a Firebird, and a prototype archtop Strat-style guitar. I brought them all into the recording studio for the *Appetite* session and they all sounded horrible."

Anything special? It was Guns N' Roses manager Alan Niven who bought two LP-alikes from the now-deceased Derrig on the advice of another LA luthier friend, Jim Foote. Slash seemingly didn't know Derrig; he certainly didn't visit his Redondo Beach workshop. Niven recalled: "I knew I had to help [Slash] when I found his latest guitar, an SG, sticking through the windscreen of the band rental van... [Foote] had these two amazing bootleg '59 sunburst Les Pauls a friend of his [Derrig] had built. Brilliant instruments. We decided to add the alnico pickups [zebra-cover Seymour Duncan Alnico II Pros] to update and customise the sound."

Derrig's copy methodology was simple. He sourced superb timbers, including flamed maple, bought old non-Burst 50s Les Pauls, copied these exactly, and finished them in sunburst. And then added a counterfeit Gibson logo. Voila! Derrig reportedly made a total of 13 fake bursts before he died. Niven secured two of them, giving one to Slash and the other to his son, Corey. Circa 2000, Slash traded a number of his other guitars for the second Derrig, though some say Slash actually has three. At the time of *Appetite*'s demos, Slash also had another 80s-made LP copy by Max Baranet... he sold this, though, "to get money to buy more drugs." It seems Slash got his first bona-fide Gibson Les Paul to tour *Appetite*, an '85 model he then had refinished.

Signature sounds? All this suggests the riff to *Paradise City* is perhaps not the Derrig. But the signature soloing sound of *Sweet Child O' Mine* probably is. It all happened quickly. *Appetite*'s basic tracks were recorded in just two weeks in January 1987.

Similar retail buy? 2010's Gibson Appetite Les Paul – Gibson's exact replica of a replica! – is now out of production but there are a host of other Gibson and Epiphone Slash Les Pauls available, approved by the top hatter himself. A con? Not really. Derrig may have been a good faker, but he was still a counterfeiter. Gibson+Slash is now a mini industry, and everyone's happy.

SLASH SAYS (FROM 2010): *"From 1986 [sic] until about 1988, that was my main guitar, that Kris built. The latest Gibson Slash model is identical to that guitar."*

©Getty Images

THE EDGE
BLACK 1970S FENDER STRATOCASTERS

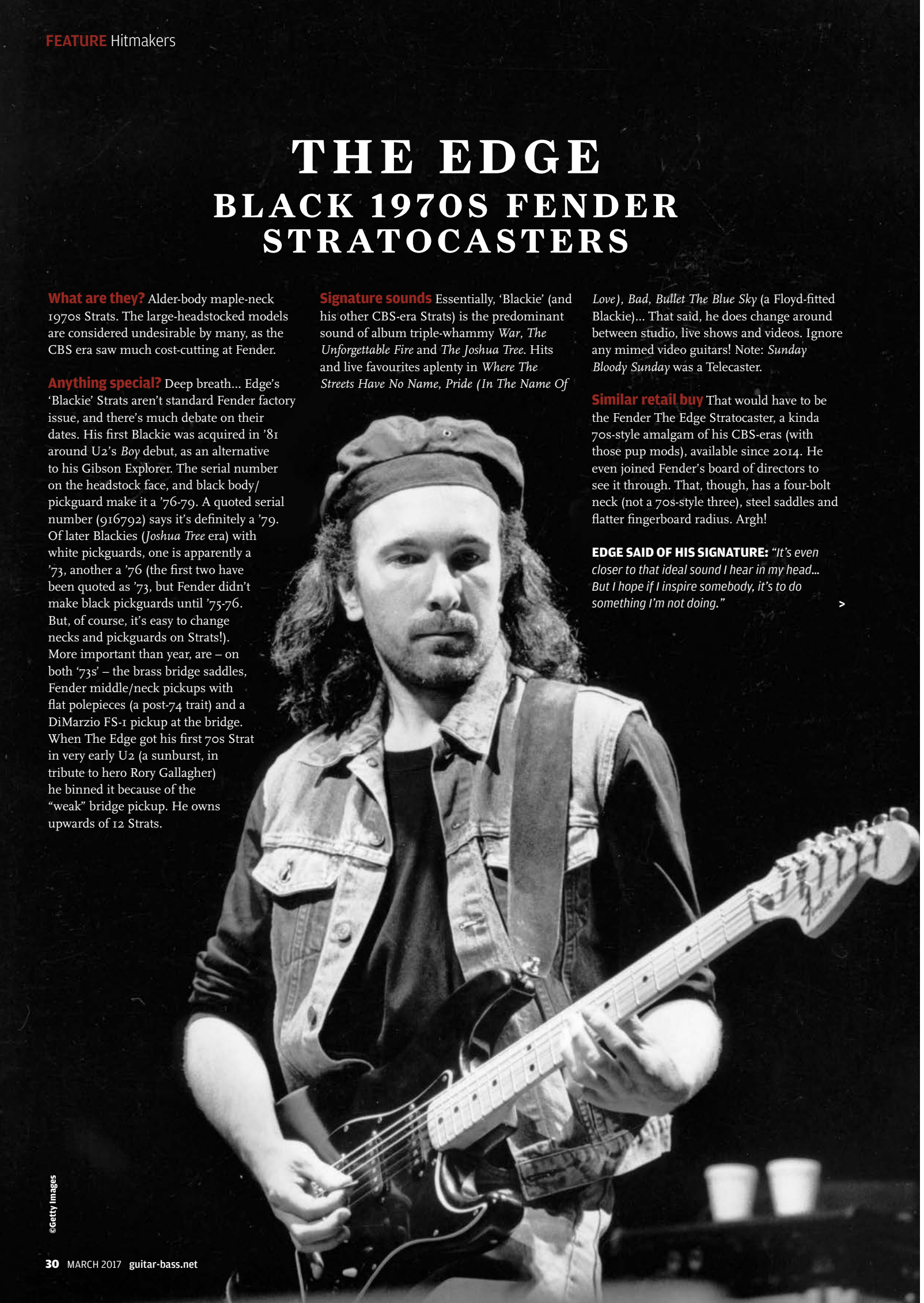
What are they? Alder-body maple-neck 1970s Strats. The large-headstocked models are considered undesirable by many, as the CBS era saw much cost-cutting at Fender.

Anything special? Deep breath... Edge's 'Blackie' Strats aren't standard Fender factory issue, and there's much debate on their dates. His first Blackie was acquired in '81 around U2's *Boy* debut, as an alternative to his Gibson Explorer. The serial number on the headstock face, and black body/pickguard make it a '76-79. A quoted serial number (916792) says it's definitely a '79. Of later Blackies (*Joshua Tree* era) with white pickguards, one is apparently a '73, another a '76 (the first two have been quoted as '73, but Fender didn't make black pickguards until '75-76. But, of course, it's easy to change necks and pickguards on Strats!). More important than year, are – on both '73s' – the brass bridge saddles, Fender middle/neck pickups with flat polepieces (a post-74 trait) and a DiMarzio FS-1 pickup at the bridge. When The Edge got his first 70s Strat in very early U2 (a sunburst, in tribute to hero Rory Gallagher) he binned it because of the "weak" bridge pickup. He owns upwards of 12 Strats.

Signature sounds Essentially, 'Blackie' (and his other CBS-era Strats) is the predominant sound of album triple-whammy *War, The Unforgettable Fire* and *The Joshua Tree*. Hits and live favourites aplenty in *Where The Streets Have No Name, Pride (In The Name Of Love), Bad, Bullet The Blue Sky* (a Floyd-fitted Blackie)... That said, he does change around between studio, live shows and videos. Ignore any mimed video guitars! Note: *Sunday Bloody Sunday* was a Telecaster.

Similar retail buy That would have to be the Fender The Edge Stratocaster, a kinda 70s-style amalgam of his CBS-eras (with those pup mods), available since 2014. He even joined Fender's board of directors to see it through. That, though, has a four-bolt neck (not a 70s-style three), steel saddles and flatter fingerboard radius. Argh!

EDGE SAID OF HIS SIGNATURE: *"It's even closer to that ideal sound I hear in my head... But I hope if I inspire somebody, it's to do something I'm not doing."* >



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PAUL MCCARTNEY
HÖFNER 500/1 VIOLIN BASS

What is it? The Fabbest bass ever. Or, more accurately, basses. There were two, see. McCartney bought his first 500/1 at the age of 18 in Hamburg in 1961, when he 'inherited' The Beatles bass role.

Anything special? Initially, not at all. "Bass was the thing that the fat boys got lumbered with and were asked to stand at the back and play," McCartney related in 1997 autobiography *Many Years From Now*, told to Barry Miles. "So I definitely didn't want to do it, but Stuart [Sutcliffe] left, and I got lumbered with it. I couldn't afford a Fender. Fenders even then seemed to be about £100... so for about £30 I found this Höfner violin bass [then new]. And to me it seemed like, because I was left-handed, it looked less daft because it was symmetrical. Didn't look as bad as a cutaway which was the wrong way."

By the time of *I Want to Hold Your Hand*, McCartney also had a '63, given to him by Höfner. This one has gold pickup covers, and soon became his main Beatles bass, with the '61 (later refinished and updated with new pickups) used as a backup. In 1966, McCartney removed the '63's scratchplate, and that's the one he still plays, bringing it back in 1989 at Elvis Costello's request for *Flowers In The Dirt*. Up until McCartney's *Flaming Pie* (1997), it still had the sellotaped-on setlist from The Beatles' final paying live show at Candlestick Park, San Francisco in August 1966. The '61 was stolen, some time around the *Let It Be* sessions.

Selected spottings The 1961 is in the *Revolution* music video, and the out-takes video for *The Ballad Of John And Yoko*. Stolen soon after, it has its own "in search of" Facebook page. The 1963 first appeared on *Ready Steady Go!*, for *I Want To Hold Your Hand* (1963), most subsequent live shows, and the *Let It Be* Apple Building rooftop show (with added Bassman sticker). When McCartney had the '63 repaired by Flip Scipio for its live 'comeback' on his 1993 New World Tour, it was flown to New York in its own first-class seat on Concorde. In the mid-60s, Höfner also made McCartney a "Presentation" 500 as thanks for popularising the basses. It was auctioned in 2013 for $201,800 – and there's no clear evidence McCartney ever even used it!

Signature sounds Warm and fat-sounding due to the hollow body. Most of McCartney's better basslines were on later (mostly Rickenbacker) Beatles cuts, but *Eight Days A Week* is an early Höf'd classic.

Similar retail buy Höfner still makes a range of 500/1s – a '64 version retails at £650, a 500/1 Cavern (similar to McCartney's '61) is £2,200. Still, who but Beatles tribute bands buys them?

MCCARTNEY SAYS (FROM 1995): *"Because the Höfner's so light you play it a bit like a guitar – all that sort of high trilling stuff I used to do, I think, was because of the Höfner. When I play a heavier bass, like a Fender, it sits me down a bit and I play just bass."*

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NILE RODGERS
1960 FENDER STRATOCASTER

What is it? In theory, a pretty 'ordinary' 1960 Fender Stratocaster with battered alder body and hard maple neck. The main mods are the neck – actually a '59 – and its 1969 pickups, again by Fender.

Anything special? Rodgers says his Hitmaker sounds like no other guitar he's ever played: before he formed Chic he was more of a soul/jazz player with a Gibson semi; he traded it for this Strat on the suggestion of bassist and co-writer Bernard Edwards. The aptly-named Hitmaker is arguably the most ubiquitous guitar in modern pop history – Rodgers' playing and production for Chic, Sister Sledge, Madonna, David Bowie, Diana Ross, Duran Duran, Daft Punk et al is estimated to have earned $2 billion worth of album sales. Yowsah! In 2013, Rodgers accidentally left the Hitmaker on a metro train, on a journey from NYC to Connecticut (it was later recovered at the MTA yard). Ironically, Fender had just visited Nile to measure up the Hitmaker for the signature repro. Shock fact? Rodgers transports the '59-necked Hitmaker in a $59 gigbag!

Signature sounds Rodgers' crystalline chops are down to his oft-mimicked, never-equalled technique, but for the sound of über-Nile listen to Chic's *Good Times* or Sister Sledge masterpieces *We Are Family*, *Lost In Music* and *Thinking Of You*.

Similar retail buy 2014's Fender Custom Shop Nile Rodgers Hitmaker Stratocaster is a faithful replica.

NILE SAYS: *After he recovered the Hitmaker in 2013, Rodgers wrote: "This is the one guitar I can't live without. It's never let me down. It's played on so many records, at so many concerts, and even comforted me after the death of my Chic band co-founder Bernard Edwards, whose body I discovered across the hall from my hotel room. The loss of my guitar gave me that same type of fear. Paralysing fear. Devastating fear."* >

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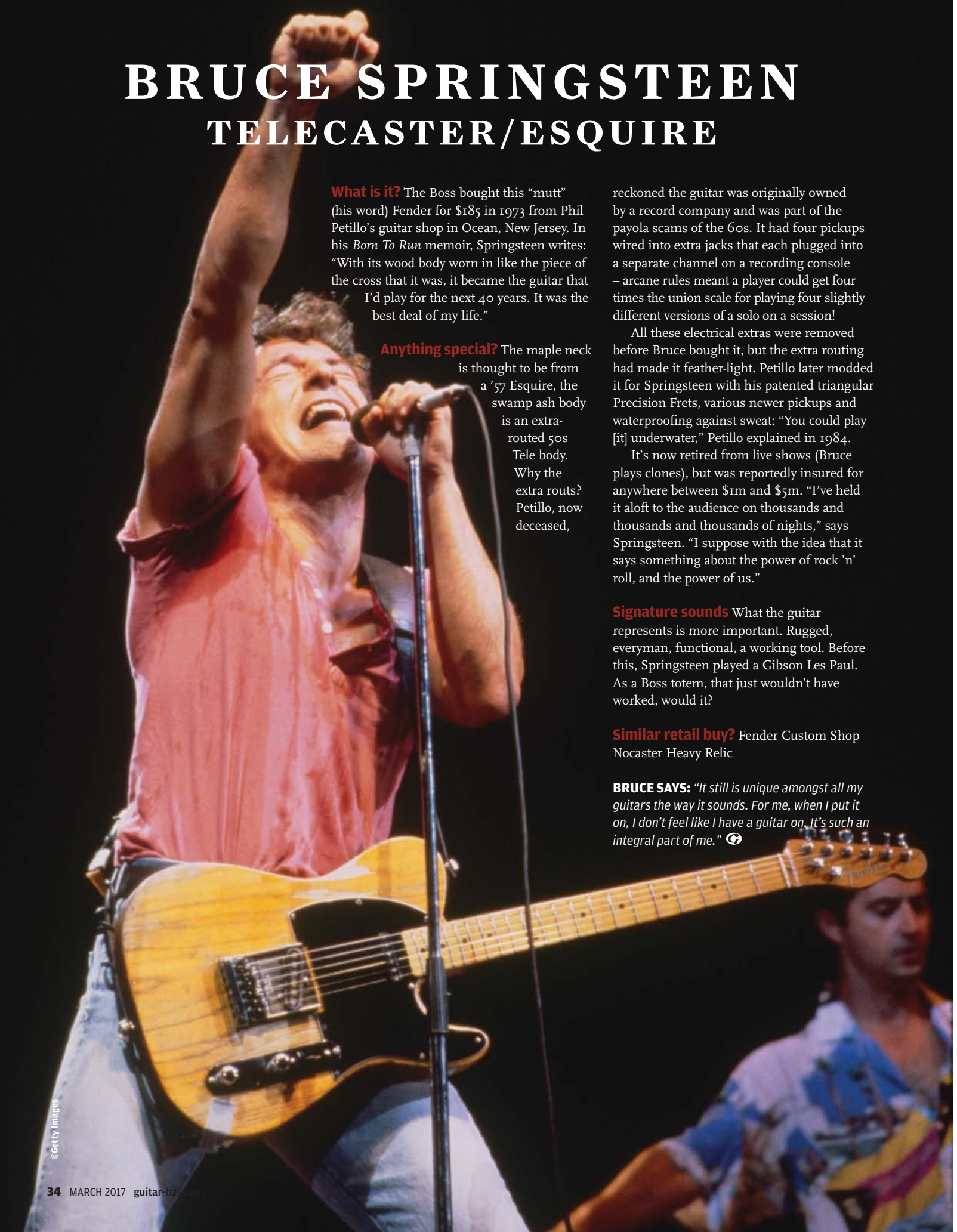
BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN
TELECASTER/ESQUIRE



What is it? The Boss bought this "mutt" (his word) Fender for $185 in 1973 from Phil Petillo's guitar shop in Ocean, New Jersey. In his *Born To Run* memoir, Springsteen writes: "With its wood body worn in like the piece of the cross that it was, it became the guitar that I'd play for the next 40 years. It was the best deal of my life."

Anything special? The maple neck is thought to be from a '57 Esquire, the swamp ash body is an extra-routed 50s Tele body. Why the extra routs? Petillo, now deceased, reckoned the guitar was originally owned by a record company and was part of the payola scams of the 60s. It had four pickups wired into extra jacks that each plugged into a separate channel on a recording console – arcane rules meant a player could get four times the union scale for playing four slightly different versions of a solo on a session!

All these electrical extras were removed before Bruce bought it, but the extra routing had made it feather-light. Petillo later modded it for Springsteen with his patented triangular Precision Frets, various newer pickups and waterproofing against sweat: "You could play [it] underwater," Petillo explained in 1984.

It's now retired from live shows (Bruce plays clones), but was reportedly insured for anywhere between $1m and $5m. "I've held it aloft to the audience on thousands and thousands and thousands of nights," says Springsteen. "I suppose with the idea that it says something about the power of rock 'n' roll, and the power of us."

Signature sounds What the guitar represents is more important. Rugged, everyman, functional, a working tool. Before this, Springsteen played a Gibson Les Paul. As a Boss totem, that just wouldn't have worked, would it?

Similar retail buy? Fender Custom Shop Nocaster Heavy Relic

BRUCE SAYS: *"It still is unique amongst all my guitars the way it sounds. For me, when I put it on, I don't feel like I have a guitar on. It's such an integral part of me."*

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Speech impaired

and completely

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NANCY'S SEVERE STUTTER CAUSED ANXIETY EVERY TIME SHE SPOKE. BUT WHEN SHE LEARNED TO PLAY GUITAR, NANCY DEVELOPED SOMETHING MUCH MORE THAN MUSICAL TALENT—SHE DEVELOPED CONFIDENCE. KNOWING FULL WELL THE STAGE IS NO PLACE FOR A STUTTERER, SHE STEPPED ONTO IT ANYWAY. AND WHEN NANCY BEGAN TO SING, SOMETHING ASTONISHING HAPPENED: HER STUTTER COMPLETELY DISAPPEARED. SINCE THEN, NANCY HAS WRITTEN OVER 100 SONGS AND PERFORMED BEFORE AUDIENCES OF MORE THAN 500 PEOPLE. IT'S THE KIND OF STORY THAT INSPIRES US AT TAYLOR, AND REMINDS US THAT THE WORLD NEEDS MORE PEOPLE LIKE NANCY. *For more about Nancy and others with the courage to step forward, visit taylorguitars.com.*

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THE Guitar & Bass INTERVIEW

"I'm very excited. It's a fresh new sound for me, a new blues. It's got a little something for everybody"

Endorsed by Carlos Santana at the age of 15, Eric Gales is an exceptional guitarist. With a rocky period in his personal life behind him, new album *Middle Of The Road* looks set to catapult Gales into the mainstream. *G&B* speaks to the larger-than-life bluesman

Words **Michael Stephens**

"Hey, how's it goin'? First, I got a question for you, man... When did you first hear my album? How much have you listened to it? Which tracks do you like?"

Some artists have to be dragged kicking and screaming to talk about their latest record. Not Eric Gales. Seconds after he picks up the phone at his North Carolina home, he's babbling at 100mph and happily screaming down the wire... if only to make sure *G&B* has done its homework. Happily, it's easy to pick out more than a few highlights on his new album *Middle Of The Road* and, reassured we're no random crank caller, Gales is happy to proceed...

"Good, good!" he laughs. "Now, I'll tell you. I'm very excited about all of it. It's a fresh new sound for me, a new blues. It's got a little something for everybody and I'm glad you like it 'cos I'm stoked!"

He should be. Gales has been around for years, acclaimed as a prodigious talent at 15 by no less than Carlos Santana, yet he's never quite cut through to the mainstream. If anything's going to change that, *Middle Of The Road* will. Centre-stage, as ever, is Gales' unquestionable virtuosity – a seemingly effortless melange of Hendrix, SRV and jazzier Eric Johnson-esque licks winding around bold riffs daubed in vividly thumping tones.

But *Middle Of The Road* is also Gales' most accessible work by some stretch. His new songs draw deeply on his well-documented personal struggles – more of which later – and he calls up some stellar friends to add radio-savvy spice. Gary Clark Jr sings and plays on a sassy cover of Freddie King's *Boogie Man*, Lauren Hill penned the lyrics for the reggae-tinged *Been So Long*, Raphael Saadiq (producer for John Legend, Q-Tip, D'Angelo and Stevie Wonder) co-wrote >

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"I came up with everything for this record in two months. It really doesn't take long when you've got something to write about"

Carry Yourself, and Gales even tips a hat to the next blues wunderkind by dueting with Christone 'Kingfish' Ingram, 15, on *Help Yourself*.

His brother, Eugene Gales, is there, of course, and the whole thing is overseen with sparse clarity by Fabrizio Grossi, producer behind rotating supergroup Supersonic Blues Machine. Grossi had produced Gales before when he guested on a George Clinton/P-Funk project in the 90s. "Eric is simply Miles Davis and Jimi Hendrix's love child," he says, "that's my story and I'm sticking to it."

Gales explains more: "I came up with everything from scratch for this record in two months. Everything. It really doesn't take long when you've got something to write about, to get to good songs. But that's the most important thing in creating a body of work. Experiences. Fab and I crossed paths before... I sort of don't remember but I do, y'know? That was when I was living in the dark age! But things are so different now. I'm very positive and I'm living in a circle of light.

"Recording was such good fun with Fabrizio. I play bass on this record, too, so when we were tracking it early on it was just me, my wife LaDonna and Fab in the studio. We all felt so excited – emotions were flying, hairs were standing up, goosebumps were happening... all before other people got involved. So I knew early on I had something going on. Boom! And that's why I believe the world is really going to take well to this record."

Gales is infamous for his style. He plays left-handed and fully upside-down (low E

string towards the floor), like Albert King, but is naturally right-handed. It's a Gales family tradition – also followed by Eugene and late brother Little Jimmy King (Manuel Gales), though Little Jimmy was left-handed – and a style handed down by uncle Dempsey Garrett Jr, a righty-playin' southpaw who jammed with Muddy Waters and Howlin' Wolf: "But I wasn't handed the guitar this way, I just picked it up and it felt natural. I guess it's genes." Although Gales teaches in classes and on his own DVDs, he says his backwards approach has never been a problem.

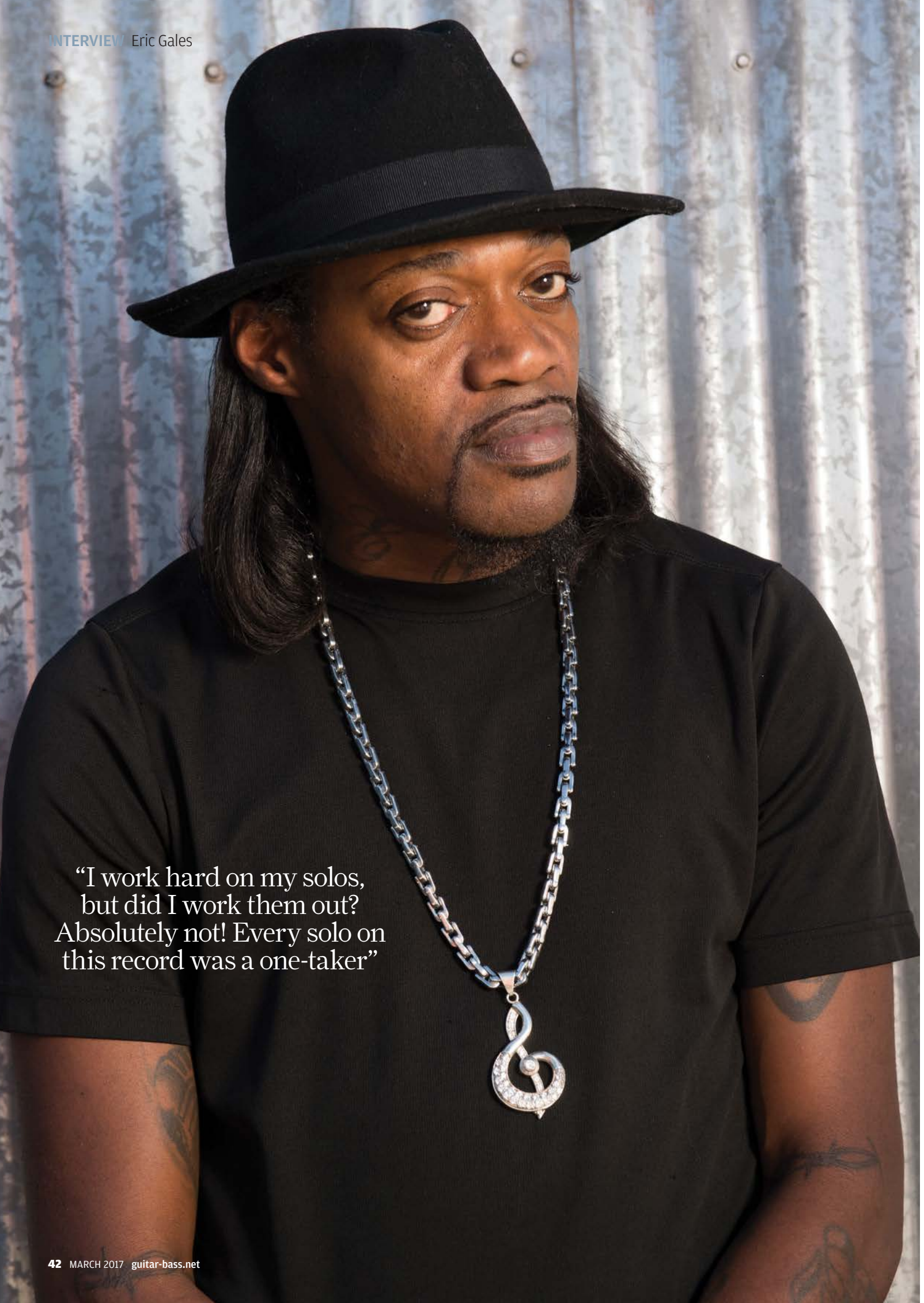
"I personally don't find it difficult, and don't think the students find it difficult to take things from me, either. The majority of my students are regular right-handed players, and if I show 'em something, I guess they just have to pay attention!

"I make them use their ear, but that's one of my big lessons anyway. It's just so important. That sounds obvious, but I truly believe that 98 per cent of picking up something is just listening to it. I can teach them the mechanics of something, if you like, but once they've got that, it's down to what they hear. Once they have the tools in their catalogue, it's up to them to pull it into their own revision, what they want to hear.

"People are like computers, man. You just need to feed in the information. That information is already there, you've just got to get it all ready. So, it all comes back to listening! But having said that, don't think too hard."

Perhaps Gales' notable 'novelty' added to his acclaim as a youth. He scored a record deal at 15 years old, Carlos Santana hooked him as support for Woodstock 1994 and adopted him as a godson, and Joe Bonamassa says Gales is, "One of the best, if not the best guitar player in the world".

Stardom was foretold, but has never quite happened for Gales... and he certainly wasn't helped by serving jail time in 2009 for breaking probation rules (midway through an *Experience Hendrix* tour) after a drug conviction. A local Memphis paper's headline of "Eric Gales: Symbol Of Failed War On Drugs" was very much the wrong >



"I work hard on my solos, but did I work them out? Absolutely not! Every solo on this record was a one-taker"

kind of media buzz. Now older, wiser and clean, Gales is fully honest about the salutes and sanctions that have come his way.

"I appreciate all the acclaim I got early on, I truly do. But I just needed to acquire a lot more to really say something – as a player, a musician, an artist, as a person. That's the difference in my creativity now.

"But the praise didn't feel like pressure to me. It felt like pressure when I got on drugs, but the whole world was closin' in on me then. And the drugs were nothin' to do with business... it was from just trying to fit in with all the boys in my neighbourhood, man. Worst decision I ever made in my life.

"But as many bridges that I burned, I never thought it was all over. Never. So I'll take the accolades. It's a lot better than being talked about as an RIP, everyone sayin' how good I was. I know what people have said before: 'Yeah, he's a badass guitar player, but...' It's the 'BUT'! Things have changed now, there's no 'but', I hope. I feel like I'm firin' on all cylinders. I'm finding out what's going on in me, and I think this record will do that for the audience, too. I think it could open the floodgates."

Screaming leads

The real reason Gales is admired is his fluid, seemingly effortless ability on the guitar. He has had no real training and claims to not know any theory, but is clearly able to solo inventively and melodically at will. In essence, many of his runs are pentatonic-based, but his 'stepladder' approach (see his DVDs) injects real dynamism and momentum into 'stock' licks. Add his use of wah, vibrato, fuzz and Whammy pedals and his solos boil over. *Middle Of The Road* has its molten moments, certainly, but is also bolstered by a refined sense of melody and structure.

"I work hard on my solos," he says, unsurprisingly, "but did I work them out? Absolutely not. I guarantee you, every solo on this record was a one-taker! My solos are just my emotions, it's indescribable. Sometimes, I'm like a savant, and anyone who's seen me play knows I can't contain myself. I'll have sporadic screams comin' out (laughs)... it's intense, amazing! But that's what playing guitar means to me."

There's a YouTube video of Gales playing live, in which he stops a song and jokingly apologises to the audience for appearing to have Tourette's Syndrome.

"Yeah, ask my wife," he laughs. "She says I should have been checked for Tourette's many times, ha ha! It's just par for the course. Playing makes me scream."

When asked what he'd be doing if he didn't play guitar, he's temporarily wordless. "Drive a truck? I really don't know. I seem absorbed by music. Oh yeah, absolutely. 100 per cent. Totally obsessed. I don't have to think about what I'm creating anymore. I just am, I'm there. But this record is more rounded. It's me, and it's about my life. It's been a long time coming, but I really don't think this is just a record for guitar players, just for shredders, it's for anyone."

It's not just talk. The new track he's most proud of on *Middle...* is *Help Me Let Go*, a self-aware gospel-blues acoustic ballad he co-wrote with... his therapist. Like his friend and own guiding light Eric Johnson, Gales is eager to challenge perceptions of what he is and isn't.

"Eric's probably the player who inspires me technically most right now," he says, "and I love his *EJ* acoustic album. I sat in with Eric when he toured, and I think it's an amazing record. People don't associate Eric with acoustic music either, but we all have hidden gems in us. That's what I believe. You'll hear more this year from me, 'cos I am going to put an acoustic record out, too. Playing and singing. More new blues. Boom!"

GALES' GEAR

Tweaked S-types, big clean tones and select stompers are the key to Eric Gales' guitar storm

Eric Gales runs a relatively simple rig – guitar, amp and a few choice floor effects. He's played numerous guitar models over the years, but because he plays left-handed upside-down can simply use any stock right-hander, though he does fit hotter bridge pickups. He has a '62 Fender Stratocaster, a Saint Blues Blindsider, a John Page S-type, a PRS ("just for some fatter rhythm tones") and an Xotic XS-1 with staggered pole Raw Vintage RV-5661 pickups. But his go-to guitar for new recordings is his signature Magneto Sonnet Raw Dawg, with "three Lollar Vintage Blackface pickups and a slightly smoother sound."

Magneto Sonnets are handmade in Japan and are simple, if pricey. "It's very standard spec, I guess," says Gales. "But I just like how it feels, real light and comfortable. That's a lot of what I look for. And I can't go out on the road with all my guitars, just a couple, and my Raw Dawg covers pretty much everything. Real simple, but it just cuts it for me."

For amps on *Middle Of The Road*, Gales discovered the Italian DV Mark models – the carry-size DV Little 250 and DV Micro 50, plus the solid-state Greg Howe-signature DV Little GH 250 power amp. "Wonderful tone, good warm sound," he says. DV Mark's Stefano 'Sebo' Xotta says: "Eric's set-up delivers a huge dynamic and headroom, and we've now put the features together in his own signature DV amp [officially launched at NAMM 2017]. He doesn't need a twin-channel amp, he just needs a single great-sounding channel, so that's what his signature amp is." "Amazing," adds Gales. "It sounds real big and clean, that's what I wanted, but also works so well with my pedals."

And those pedals are key. The core is his EWS Brute Drive – a classic-sounding drive that acts very much like a valve amp – and the harder Mojo Hand Colossus "kicked in for nearly all my solos". Gales also regularly runs a Tech 21 Boost D.L.A., a Dunlop MXR EVH117 Flanger and a Dunlop/Custom Audio Electronics MC404 CAE wah. He tunes down half a step to E♭ and uses the "butt end" of a light pick for added attack with his 0.010-0.046 strings set to a very low action.

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10 TOP TIPS

Charlie Starr

The guitarist and frontman in Southern-rock kings Blackberry Smoke shares his songwriting advice

Interview **Gary Walker**

1 Write in different keys and tempos

"This will help you avoid becoming too repetitious or redundant. Using different tunings or a capo is a good idea. Generally, because I'm going to be the one singing the song, I'll find what key is comfortable in my vocal range, but there's a little bit to play with there, too. Sometimes, it'll come down to a specific choice – I want this song to be fast, or I want it to be slow, or waltz time, or heavy or laid back. I've always been a big believer in our band making records that have a lot of variety. I use standard tuning a lot, but also open G, drop D, open D... there's a song on the new album that's in C sharp, which is nice and sludgy like Sabbath. I don't know if I've ever written in anything other than 4/4 and 3/4 – there are little twists and turns and musical interludes in some of the arragnements, but I've always been fascinated by bands like Yes and Pink Floyd who really push the envelope with time signatures."

2 Try not to plagiarise

"I can't tell you how many times I've played something to someone in the band, or my wife or a friend or whoever, and they'll say, 'That's The Kinks, *Apeman*', and I'm like, 'Shit, ah well!'. Sometimes it's involuntary, you kind of spit out something that you've absorbed over the years musically. In 2016, though, there are few chord progressions on any instrument that haven't been played yet; but try to find something different that's phrased in a different way, musically or lyrically. Phrasing and nuance on the guitar, and lyrically, are important. As a band, we're all influenced by so many different kinds of music – most people our age are. We just try to play and write what feels comfortable and feels inspired."

3 Pay attention, and be ready for inspiration

"Inspiration is all around, so pay attention. Whether it's something you see happen to someone, an interesting person and something they say, or a tune on the radio, it can be anything and can strike anywhere. If you ever get the

chance to spend some time in the deep South, hearing people speak – especially older people – they say some pretty inspiring things. It's an inspiring culture, and all of the music we love is native to the South – blues, hillbilly, gospel and even jazz. It's everywhere, and that's true in any culture – there are things that can provide you with inspiration all around us."

4 Don't try to cram too many ideas into one song

"I think this is true musically and lyrically. I mentioned Yes earlier, and they were able to do that successfully, but in the type of music we make, it's best to be economical with the idea because you can clutter a song up with too many ideas – musically or lyrically. A songwriter friend of mine I knew at High School gave me that advice specifically. He said, pretty much, keep it simple and write what you know, and I think that's good advice.
I do a lot of editing before a song is complete, and try to be a good editor of myself. A lot of times that kind of thing will happen when you start to record a song. You'll say, 'We don't need this change here, or this part' or the opposite: 'We need another turnaround here' or, 'We need something to happen, it feels as if it's a little empty'. Those things usually work themselves out."

5 Learn how to sing

"It may sound like silly advice, but I think it's very important – if you're going to write songs, you're going to have to sing them. Because if you don't, you're not writing a song, you're just writing lyrics. Learning to sing will make your writing more melodic, and I think it's necessary. It's a two-piece puzzle and lyrics and melody are the two pieces. If you just want to be a guitar player don't worry about it, but if you want to be a songwriter you've gotta sing 'em. I was really bashful about singing until I was in my early 20s, and always wanted to hire a singer because I didn't feel comfortable. Then I found out lead singers are all insane, so I thought, 'I'm going to do this myself, because I'm not insane!'. All of us guitar players are perfectly sane...
I wound up in a covers band and we had gigs to play in the local bars, and our lead singer quit at the last minute before a gig and took off with some girl, so I thought, 'Alright, I'm going to have to sing tonight'. I did it, and had a few drinks, which made it easier, and then I thought, 'This is better – and I don't have to pay another person!'. That's how it all started for me."

6 Write on various instruments

"I read years ago that Tom Waits said whatever your main instrument is, get off that instrument from time to time and pick up something else. Most musicians can make a tune on anything; and if you're a musician you can pick up another instrument and figure out how to play something. Tom Waits said that on your main instrument you become like a dog and your hands go to familiar places every time. It becomes second nature and you think, 'Oh here I go, I'm going to play this thing that I always do'. That's him playing the piano when he was younger. He said, 'I want to find a different voice'. I've found that to be true, too. I've written songs on the banjo, the mandolin and the piano and I'm not especially good at any of those, but it's fun to try to find a new tune on something different."

Getty Images

> "Someone, somewhere down the line, is going to tell you your songs suck – you need to be prepared"

7 Be prepared for criticism

"I know it's easier said than done, but someone, somewhere down the line is going to tell you your songs suck, and you need to be prepared to hear that. I don't think you can really prepare for it as such, you just have to hope your skin is thick enough when it comes. Every producer we've had has said no to at least one song for each record, and you have to say, 'Okay'. I can definitely look at some songs as they're being written and stop because it's not good, and I'm headed down the wrong path and it's not worth the time. But it's tough when you feel passionate about a song and someone says they don't like it. That still happens to us as a band, and I don't think we'd be human if it didn't. At the end of the day, you've just got to say, 'OK, so be it'."

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8 Think about the other instruments

"As a guitar player, if you write a song and you plan for it to be played by an ensemble, think about every instrument and what they will be doing, because sometimes that can dictate what the guitar will do – some instruments will marry themselves to one another sonically. Sometimes, you can create your own magic that way and think, 'Okay, I want the second guitarist to do this, and the bass to do this and the drums to do this...'. It also helps people listen to the other guys in the band, rather than just thinking, 'I'm playing my guitar and really that's all I'm listening to'. At this point, after we've played together for so long, you start to hear in your head what the people in your band might play anyway, and it becomes sort of like a telepathy. I know that sounds corny, but it's true – I will have that in mind already: 'This guy plays like this, so he'll probably do something like this', and that's always open to interpretation because everyone plays their instrument differently. But those magical little moments that happen in two-guitar bands on those records we love, like *Toys In The Attic*, or *Highway To Hell*, the interplay between people, that's the magic for me – not just the one guy, but the whole ensemble."

9 Always carry a notebook or recording device

"This is much easier these days, as everybody's phone is essentially a recording device. I can't tell you how many ideas I've had as I'm about to go to sleep and thought, 'I need to jot down or record it because I'm going to forget it', and then I think, 'No I won't forget it', and sure as hell I forget every time, so it's a good idea to be ready to document your ideas in any way possible, because you never know when they'll strike. I'm not especially prolific, I write enough songs for us to make an album every year with a few left over, but I don't have a stockpile of 200. I don't write for exercise, I only write when I'm inspired because if you write when you're not inspired, you'll write an uninspired song. I use Garageband and make complete demos that I present to the band, but it's different for everybody."

10 When you write a song, be prepared to play it for the rest of your life

"If you decide to write a goofy song about a tailgate or a tractor, or whatever, if you think that it might become a hit because that's what's popular right now, just remind yourself: 'If it does become a hit, I've got to sing it for the rest of my life'. If there's a song of yours that people really want to hear, that will help to keep it fresh, because the fact that it makes people happy is what keeps it interesting. If people didn't give a shit about a song and you had to play it for the next 16 years to people who don't care it would probably start to get tough. But if you're playing a song every night and seeing people sing along and smile, that's where the energy comes from. But don't dumb a song down because you think it could be popular, because that's cheating people." *Blackberry Smoke are on tour in the UK from 27 March to 8 April. Their album, Like An Arrow, is out now.*

"Those magical little moments that happen in two-guitar bands, that's the magic for me"

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Promise of the Neil

They melted fans' faces on Neil Young's Rebel Content tour. *G&B* talks with sibling newcomers Promise Of The Real, who have re-lit the Godfather Of Grunge's creative fuse...

Story TERI SACCONE

When Neil Young released his 36th studio album *The Monsanto Years* in 2015, it featured up-and-comers Promise Of The Real, who replaced long-time cohorts Crazy Horse. POTR are a band built around Lukas Nelson, that – when playing with Young – includes his younger brother Micah, both offspring of iconic American musician Willie Nelson. To hear them on the aforementioned album and the 2016 live release *Earth* is an energising experience. But when *G&B* witnessed POTR live last year, it became clear these youngsters inject a new life force into the Canadian legend's gloriously ragged, eternal music.

When the 20-something guitarists huddle onstage with Young, they form one pulsating musical heart. Visceral jams, searing solos and seismic riffing prove 'Old Shakey' is playing some of the finest live music of his long and monumental career. The artistic alchemy is saturated with such kinetic energy that the emotionally charged gigs

remain in the consciousness long after the shows are over. Besides classic cuts, Promise Of The Real dust off deep cuts such as *Vampire Blues*.

Speaking with Micah and Lukas separately, *G&B* finds both exceedingly grounded, grateful and artistically aspirational. Aside from mentions of Maui, Venice Beach and Austin, Texas (their former or current homesteads), the brothers exhibit no hint that they are scions of a multi-millionaire music superstar.

This is partly due to their mother, who, when Willie was touring, made sure both boys grew up without entitlement. Their rebellious salt-of-the-earth father also instilled solid values, yet Willie remains a trailblazer (not many octogenarians could pull off a single like his duet with Snoop Dog on *Roll Me Up And Smoke Me When I Die*).

It was at a Farm Aid gig with their dad that 'Uncle Neil' first saw them play, invited them for a jam, and then to his Annual Bridge School Benefit Concert, before POTR (including drummer Anthony LoGerfo, bassist Corey McCormick and percussionist Tato Melgar) became his recording and live unit, all in the space of a few months in 2015.

Despite their musical pedigree, initially it must have been intimidating to be faced suddenly with playing to massive audiences. "It's like big-wave surfing," replies Lukas, munching on cherries backstage. "You train like an athlete to get to the point where you ride the wave, get into the barrel and it's 'do or die' up there on stage. So I'm doing what I love and I've tried to prepare for this."

> "They're much better players than I am. Lukas is like a gunslinger and Micah is very ethereal. I'm somewhere in between" NEIL YOUNG, 2015

Surprisingly, Micah is a bit of a newbie to guitar, having taken it up in his late teens (he's now 26) after mastering both drums and harmonica as a child. "Maybe a little bit at first," he concedes. "We are obviously huge fans." Or perhaps super-fans, as the genesis of POTR began when LoGerfo met Lukas at a Neil Young concert several years ago. Micah adds: "Neil doesn't want us to hold back musically, and we all were quickly absorbed into the fold with him. We look up to him with respect, but he never treated us like we were younger, he treats us as equals. He's now our homie and he doesn't act like he's 71."

Micah acknowledges the utter surrealism of being on the world's stages unleashing a torrent of sound alongside a man who has been venerated for decades.

"It's crazy! I don't know what else to say except that it just happens up there. I don't mean to say we're amazing, but we just play by feel and sometimes I can't even hear what's happening, and then I'm playing by smell," he laughs. "Last night, I couldn't hear most of the show and yet I got through it, and to me, that's the most exciting part of this: you can really feel there's a band of humans communicating telepathically up there. It could derail at any moment, it could crash and burn – and that's exciting, and there's >

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PROMISE OF THE REAL - GEAR

MICAH NELSON

GUITARS

- Gibson Melody Maker Jr "With a Seymour Duncan Antiquity Firebird humbucker pickup in the neck and factory P-90 in the bridge. The tone knob has been replaced by a pickup switch. The body used to be piss yellow, but I woodstained it and hand-painted it with ferns. Named 'Smithy' (after the girl I bought it from)."
- Paul Reed Smith McCarty "PRS named it the McCarty after his luthier mentor Ted McCarty. This guitar was a gift from a friend. I love the mother of pearl birds laid into the neck. The viola-esque sloping body with f-holes makes it easy for bowing."
- Cancion electric charango "I had played with Insects Vs Robots for years using a wooden acoustic charango with a K&K contact pickup, but the electric charango changed my life when it comes to tone, feedback control and versatility, especially when playing through effects and amps. I'm glad I found the Cancion before joining up with Neil. It was made by a luthier in Bolivia from Jacaranda wood and ebony, with a piezo pickup in the bridge."

AMPS

- 1963 Princeton Reverb
- 1965 Baldwin C1 Supersound

LUKAS NELSON

GUITAR:

- '56 Les Paul Junior
- Late-90s Fender Strat with Rio Grande bridge humbucker
- Fender Strat (unspecified year)

AMPS

- Magnatone Twilighter
- Vintage Baldwin combo

EFFECTS

- MXR preamp
- JHS SuperBolt overdrive

STRINGS, PICKS

- DR Strings (.011-.050)
- Medium Guthrie Thomas picks

Lukas (left) and Micah with Neil Young at the Desert Trip festival in California

© Getty Images

a lot of happy accidents that way. Neil likes to invite the universe in, and there's no holding back. So when you're together in that moment, being as present as possible, you're just along for the ride. But it's definitely a dream-like scenario."

Triple threat

Older brother Lukas concurs, to some degree. "I always hear myself, because I'm standing right next to my amp, so even if I can't hear my monitors I can hear my amp. I'm also using visualisation, watching where Neil is on the neck. So if he's low, I can go high so I won't be duplicating him."

Both Micah and Lukas state separately that with Young, not thinking when playing is the optimum mental state in order to allow the magic to happen. "Those no-thinking moments make for the greatest music, when your body takes over," Lukas explains.

"There's that inner voice criticising what you're doing, so the key is to murder that guy in your head as soon as possible,"confides Micah. "Ideally, at every show there's the moment we get out of our own way and we're not really doing anything: we're at the mercy of the the music happening, and then the music is bigger than us. We're holding on for dear life. Anyway, the goal is to be almost meditating. Some of the songs are essentially two chords with a long, void space where you can really lay back and not rush.

"It's like shamanic, tribal drumming, but for guitarists, so you make the most of it, being in that place, you smell the flowers and don't over-think what you're playing. These songs are deceptively simple if they're one or two chords repeated over and over, yet it can be complex, and with three guitars you can draw on the others – with three guitarists, less is more. You don't always have to be playing something; the key is to be great or be gone."

> "I feel like the journey of playing guitar starts from understanding how to play, to next learning what not to play and when not to play" LUKAS NELSON

Until last year, Lukas was POTR's lone guitarist, and his steepest learning curve has been playing with two others.

"I went from my sets, where I'm the only guitarist, to playing with Neil and Micah and have it be dynamic and clear, so that it's not this muddied distortion of three guitars. I feel like the journey of playing guitar starts from understanding how to play, to next learning what not to play and when not to play. That's the side of the journey I'm trying to master: learning where the spaces fit between the notes. I'm listening constantly to what they're playing, so that whatever I'm playing underneath really fits into the puzzle."

Lukas clarifies that when playing alongside Young, parts are not allocated to strict lead and rhythm roles – rather, it's a case of doing what works well: "It's all about listening," he says. "It's kind of a process of elimination. So you can't do what the other guys are doing, like with harmony singing, you sing different parts, not the same ones as the others, to complement their parts."

Of the brothers, Lukas took up the guitar first and learnt much from his dad, as well as members of Willie's band. "I had a lot of informal teachers," he explains. "Nobody learns without outside influence. Then I got to play in my father's band, which taught me so much."

All the preparation helped Lukas to embed quickly with Neil, who changes his setlist virtually every night due largely to POTR, who like to encourage him to bring out old gems such as those from *On The Beach*... But is it true they had to learn 80 songs before hitting the road? "I've lost count, as we're always adding things to the set," Lukas says. "But I already knew many of them, as we've been fans forever. And we love digging up rare tracks to play." Any favourites? "I get a

kick out of everything," he says, "especially *Rocking In The Free World* and *Tonight's The Night*."

POTR recorded *Monsanto Years* in Oxnard, southern California at the Teatro theatre, where their dad recorded *Teatro* in 1998. Besides Young's relaxed vibe during the proceedings, the guys had a stimulating daily ritual; mornings were spent surfing off Oxnard Beach. "There's nothing better than getting into the rhythm of the ocean, then going to play guitar to match that same rhythm," says Lukas.

They initially convened at the historic Teatro sans Young, with only rough acoustic demos, and were encouraged to not overlearn the songs, so as to keep things fresh and spontaneous. The band set up on the stage instead of inside a studio to capture a raw, live vibe, having learnt the *Monsanto* demos "just enough so that we sounded raw and unpolished". Nights after recording was done were spent dining on Mexican food.

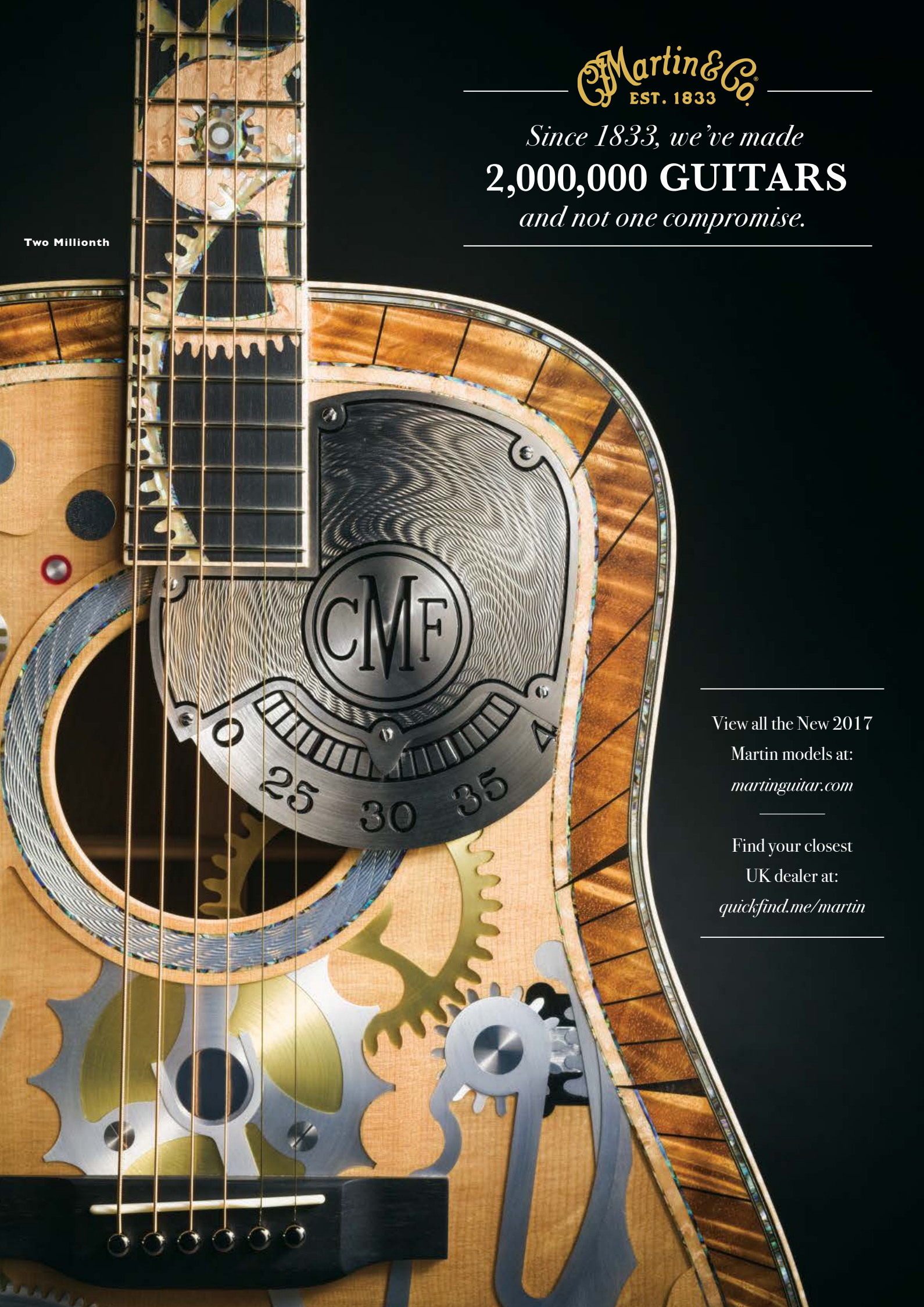
On the beach

Did Neil surf? "No, but he does stand-up paddle surfing," Lukas says. "That's really good for the core. He's in really good shape." With Promise Of The Real having taken on the request to not over-prepare their parts, the songs were captured quickly – most were done within two or three takes.

Besides Willie's Texan background, their mother Annie, with her Italian-American roots, left an impression on the brothers. Did she nurture their musicality despite not being a musician?

"I spent a lot of time with her," Lukas replies, "because my dad was on the road, and when we'd travel to him we were like two little ducklings, following her. She listened to tonnes of old rock 'n' roll and introduced me to Hendrix and Stevie Ray Vaughan and all points between. With dad, I got introduced to the country world. So between them both, I got a great balance of rock and country. But honestly, my mom's the reason I like to rock."

"My mom is of Sicilian heritage and a huge music lover who played us everything," adds >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Micah. "My brother and I also went through a Big Band phase, like Glenn Miller and Benny Goodman plus, from mom, lots of classic rock, Stax and Motown. I was also really into Mozart and Bach as a little kid. Musically, she was everywhere... but her character was tough as she's the granddaughter of (notorious mobster) Carlo Gambino. My grandma changed her name to Gambina when she came through Ellis Island, to disassociate from the Mafia. But I guess that left traces on her, in some respects."

The pair grew up primarily in Hawaii which, Micah explains, helped them not feel different. "I think that was a smart move on my folks' part, as my mom saw that Texas might be a bit difficult – because there, our dad is practically the president. In Hawaii, we could be more anonymous. I love Austin and my family and friends there. But in Maui, nobody gives a shit about celebrity. Not as many people have an agenda, it's a good environment to raise a kid."

Lukas started playing guitar at 10, while Micah, who began with harmonica, became a drumming prodigy by eight. After switching to guitar in his late teens, Micah discovered the Andean churango, which he uses with with his other band Insects Vs Robots.

"It's a got a cinematic quality and has 10 strings," he says. "I stumbled upon one in a little shop in Quito, Ecuador and had never heard one. I started playing it, jammed with it, figured out different chord shapes for the tuning I had it in... with its diatonic notes, it's not the same notes as a guitar, with the low strings in the middle – it's a very idiosyncratic instrument and it works with a lot of different things. In my band, I play an electric one and I used to play an acoustic one, but we have a wide spectrum of sounds in that. It sounds like it comes from another dimension! I played it on *Wolf Moon* on *The Monsanto Years*.

During the tours with Young, Micah has been busily writing "an interactive album with a movie. It's lo-fi, and we're turning our studio in Venice, CA into a soundstage – so it'll be an online viewing experience, part animated. I wrote the script and each song has different characters with part-animation."

> "I play the Andean churango... It's cinematic and has 10 strings. It's very idiosyncratic and it works with a lot of different things"
>
> MICAH NELSON

Meanwhile, Lukas plans to release new, original music with POTR this year. "I have 30 or 40 new tunes ready to release. It's poignant and relevant, the lyrics and vocals, it's all culminating in our own style, which is country-rock/folk. It'll be a combination of acoustic and electric. I'm looking forward to getting this out, because although I play different instruments and sing, I think my strength is songwriting. We've been working with John Alagía (John Mayer, Dave Matthews), who works at The Village studio, and we're now putting on lap steel."

The future looks bright, albeit rammed with lots of projects. "POTR want to do both Neil's and our own stuff," says Lukas. "There's a lot happening in my life and I'm trying to go with the flow. My dad has said he wants me to be around a lot more, and he's 83, so I will. Neil has said the same, and I'll be there for them both. But I also want to build my artistry with my band."

The brothers are generous in their praise of each other. Micah describes Lukas as an "incredibly gifted singer" and his "main guitar influence", while Lukas enthuses: "My brother now prefers to play guitar, but he writes these masterpiece arrangements for his band and is one of the best drummers I know. I'm really proud of him learning the guitar and he does these amazing soundscapes. He's also learning the piano, but Micah's true genius is in his visual arts."

We can't end the interview without returning to a subject close to Lukas' heart – his guitars. "My guitars are named after the woman that I'll always love, no matter what," he tells us. "So Christina, my red Strat, is named after the girl I was with for eight years, on and off. It's a beautiful guitar. I bought it when I was first with her. Now, I'm only playing Christina, plus Georgia (aka 'The Spanish Inquisition') – a '56 Les Paul Junior. There's another Strat, my first guitar, which my parents bought me, called Bonnie – named after my first girlfriend. So those are my three main guitars. As far as acoustics go, I just bought one in Nashville I call the Black Horse – it's a Martin composite."

On stage at the Beale Street festival in Memphis in 2016

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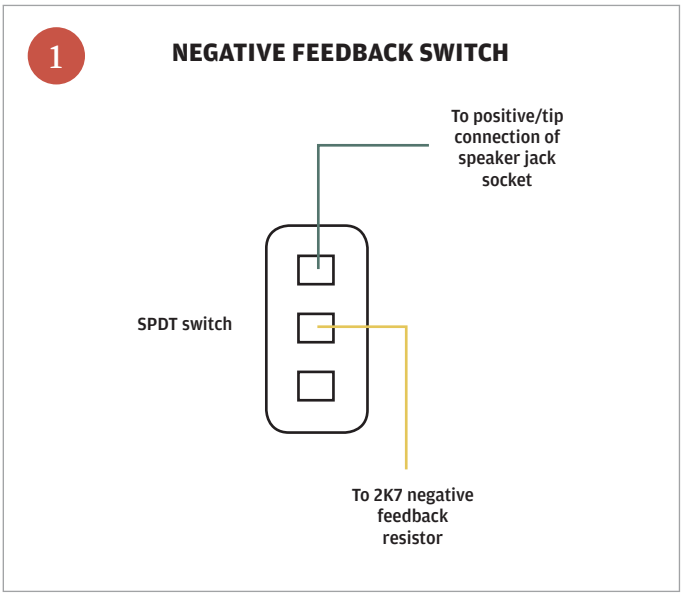
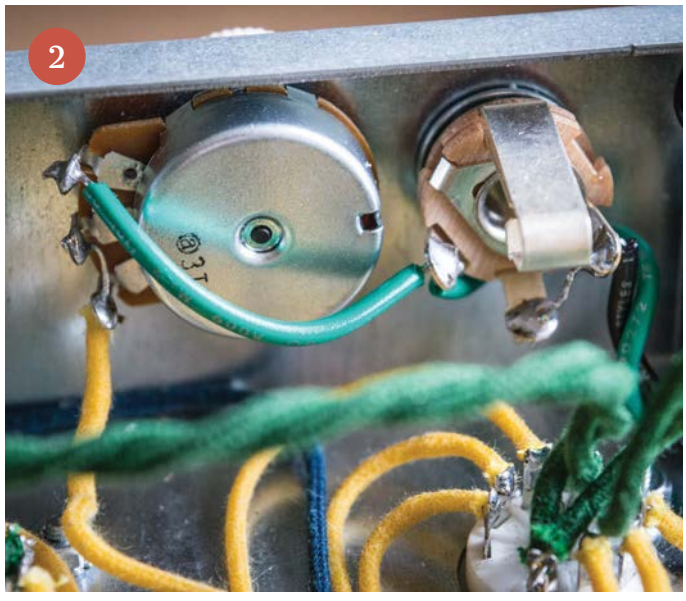
DIY WORKSHOP

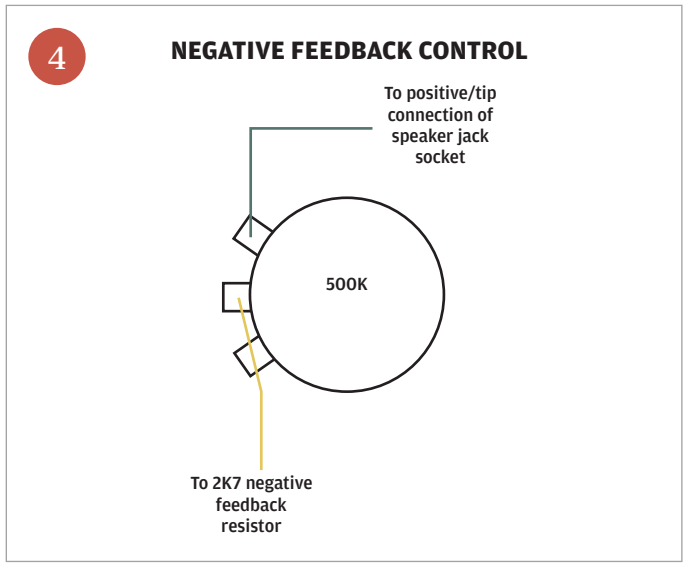
RIFT AMP MODIFICATIONS

In the second instalment of our Rift project, **HUW PRICE** gets deeply tweedy with cathode-bias switching, negative feedback modifications and more

PART 2







1 A simple feedback on/off switch is one of the easiest mods you can perform on a Princeton

2 You can replace the external speaker output with a switch or a feedback control, as we have done here

3 We used a matching feedback control knob; using existing and unwanted holes is easier than drilling new ones

4 Wired this way, the feedback circuit is stock when the control is fully clockwise, and feedback is disabled with the control fully anticlockwise

The Princeton Reverb is arguably the most modded of all the classic amplifier designs. In fact, the very first Mesa/Boogies were basically Princeton Reverbs that Randall Smith hot-rodded back in 1969. Since then, all manner of things have been done to this circuit, mostly in an attempt to increase gain and sustain or raise clean headroom and power levels. Various approaches have been taken and some, such as the 'Paul C' and 'Stokes' mods, have become very well known.

My feeling is that if you want more clean headroom and volume, you're probably better off installing a beefier Deluxe Reverb-spec output transformer or, better still, buying a Deluxe Reverb. From the get-go, the purpose of this project has been to explore the full potential of the stock circuit without losing its essential character.

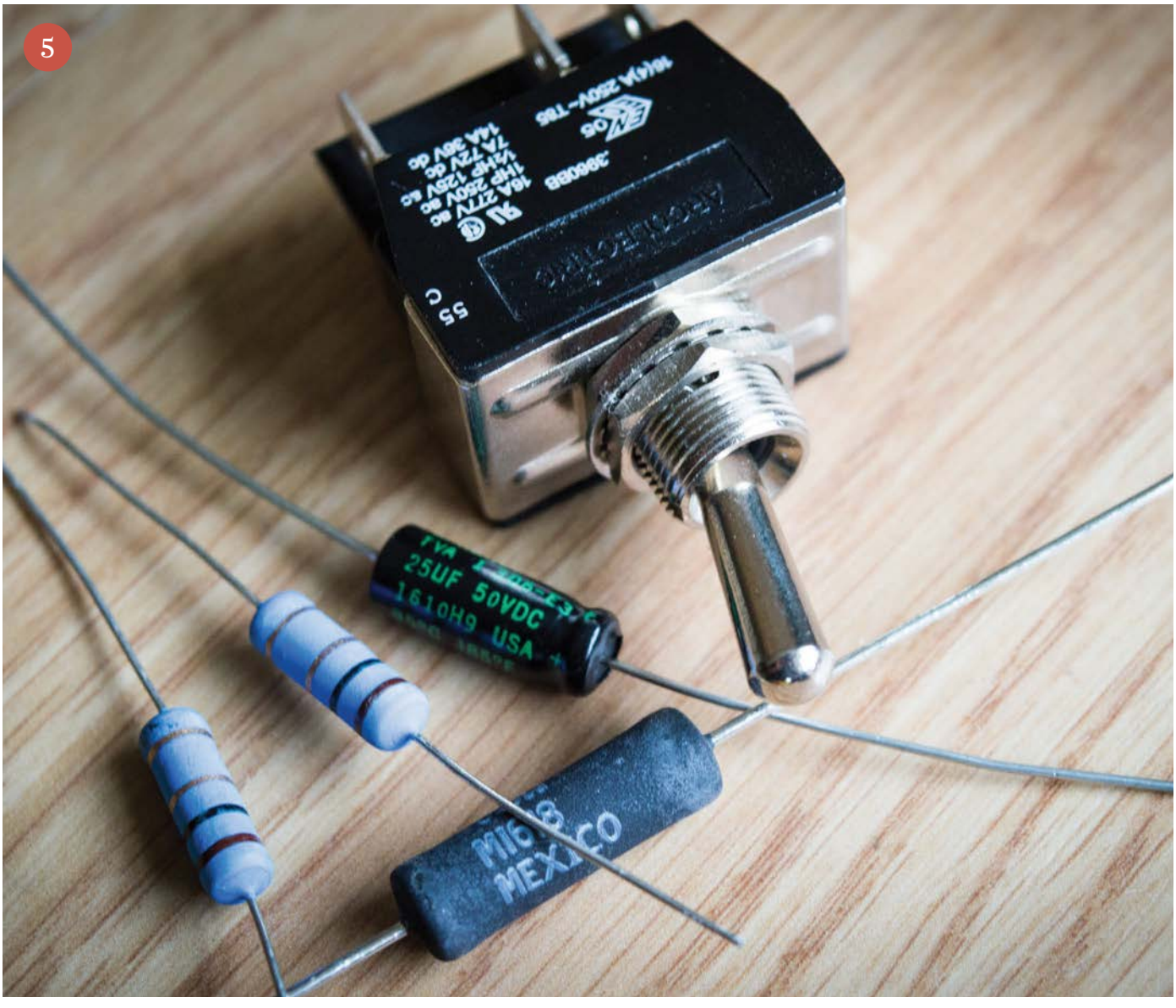
When I suggested to Chris Fantana of Rift Amplification that the Princeton Reverb could potentially be three amps in one, he thought about it for a few moments and said, "More like five". So following on from the brownface/blackface tonestack switching and the reverb tweaks we explored in our previous workshop, this month we'll be attempting to take things in a tweedier direction with cathode-bias switching, negative feedback tweaks and more besides.

Negative feedback fun

Most of Fender's low- and mid-power tweed amps were designed without a negative feedback loop. The 5F11 Vibrolux that so closely resembles the brownface Princeton is an exception, but negative feedback was never used in any of the tweed Deluxe models.

The negative feedback that your boss might give you during your annual appraisal and negative feedback in an amplifier are different things, but the results can be similar. Negative feedback can leave you and your amp feeling a bit flat and somewhat lifeless.

In an amplifier, a connection is made from the positive terminal of the output transformer and a portion of the output signal is fed back to the cathode of one of the preamp valves. Since the output signal will be out of phase with the preamp signal at that point, there will be some phase cancellation that slightly reduces output but makes the amp run cleaner and tightens the bass.



Removing or modifying the negative feedback is one of the easiest mods you can make to an amplifier, and the best thing is that it generally costs nothing and is easily reversed.

Start by de-soldering the green wire from the positive terminal of the external speaker jack and covering the exposed wire with some insulation tape to prevent it from shorting out. Have a listen and see if you like the tone without negative feedback. If you don't, simply re-solder the green wire to the external speaker socket and skip to the next mod.

If you decide you like it, but you want to retain the option, you should consider a negative feedback switch 1. Replacing one of the control pots with a push/pull or push/push pot would allow you to switch the negative feedback from the front panel. Alternatively, you can remove the extension speaker jack if it's a feature you wouldn't use and put a toggle switch in its place. You could also drill an extra switch hole in the back panel if you want to retain the external speaker option.

Schematics show the Princeton Reverb has a 2K7 feedback resistor, but the 5F11 Vibrolux and brownface Princeton have a 56k resistor. This means more feedback is applied in the Princeton, which is one of the reasons it runs cleaner. I decided to place a 500k potentiometer in the external speaker jack socket hole to use as a variable resistor feedback control 2 & 3.

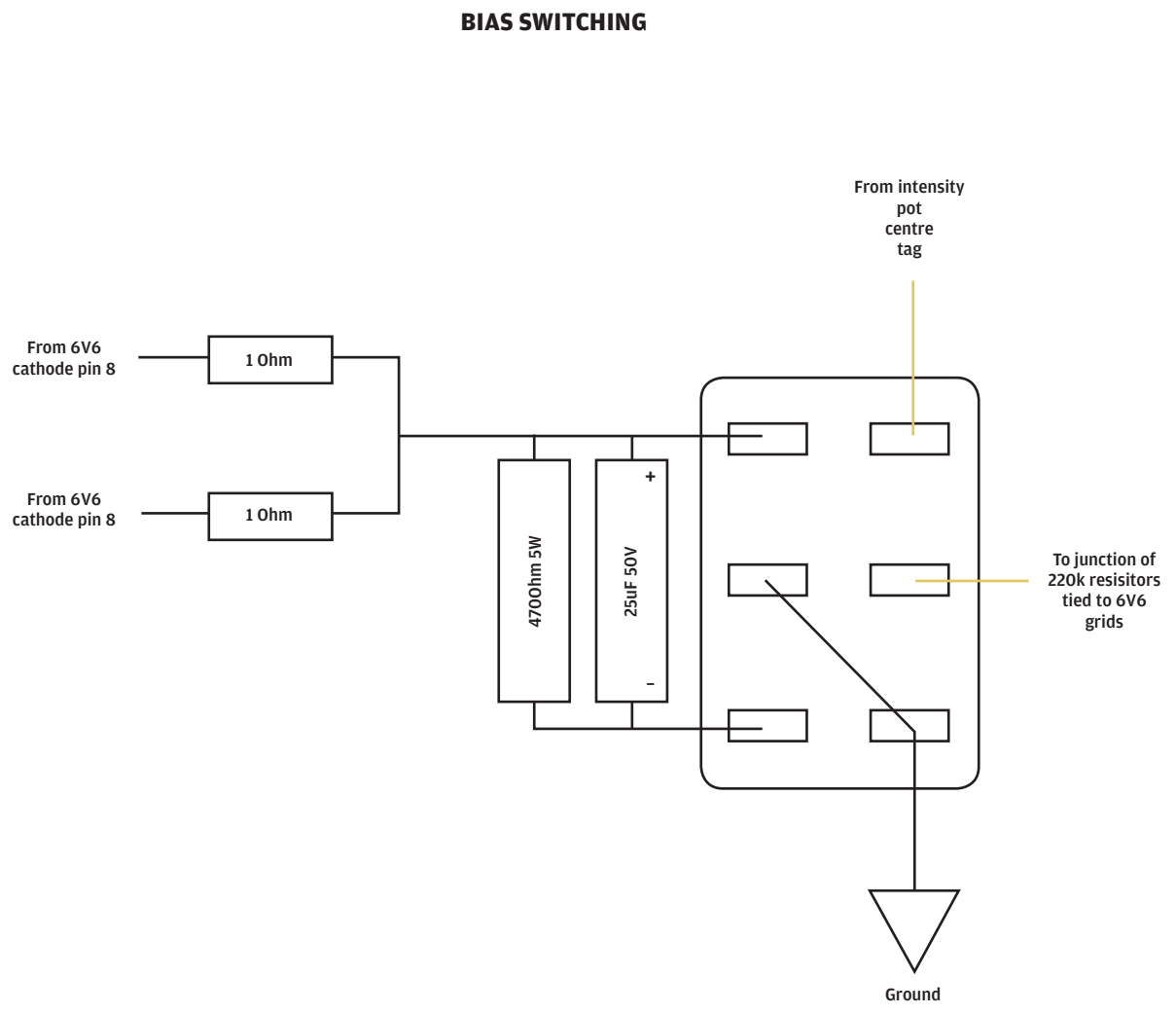
Fully clockwise, the feedback signal passes straight through the pot and 'sees' only the 2K7 resistor that remains in position on the board. Fully counter-clockwise, the 500k pot resistance combines with the 2K7 resistor to impede the feedback signal – which is tantamount to no negative feedback at all. You also get all points in between 4.

The effect is thicker mids and quicker overdrive. As feedback is lowered, you will also get a more compressed dynamic response and a definite softening in the low-frequency range.

You may also perceive an increase in harmonic overtones, which brightens the sound and may prompt you to set the treble control a bit lower. I generally find that lower negative feedback makes an amp feel more 'playable'. Feel free to experiment with resistor, potentiometer and capacitor values to find your preferred settings. >

5 Only a handful of parts is required for bias switching, but use high-power resistors and make sure the bypass capacitor is rated at 50v or more

6



6 The cathode-bias components are mounted onto the switch with a ground jump wire linking the left and right sides

Fixed/cathode bias

If you read our All About Rectification feature (*G&B* December 2016), you may recall the simplest type of valve is a diode. The only components are an anode and cathode, and so long as the anode is positively charged and the cathode is connected to ground, electrons emitted from the heated cathode will be attracted to the anode and a direct electrical current will flow.

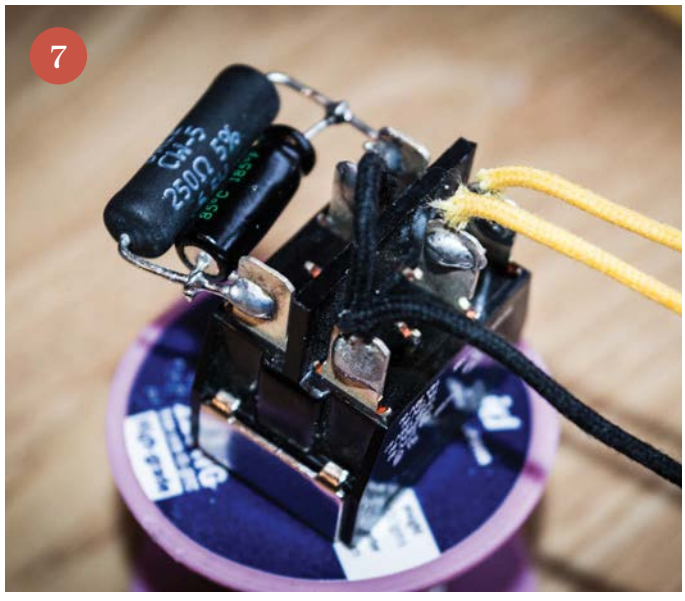
The current flowing through a valve when no signal is present is often compared to the idle revs of a car. There is an optimum setting where the revs are high enough that the engine can tick over at rest without stalling, but not so high that the car will lurch out of control when you release the clutch. Similarly, valves must be set to optimise tone and prolong operational life. This is called biasing, and there are two main methods to bias power valves.

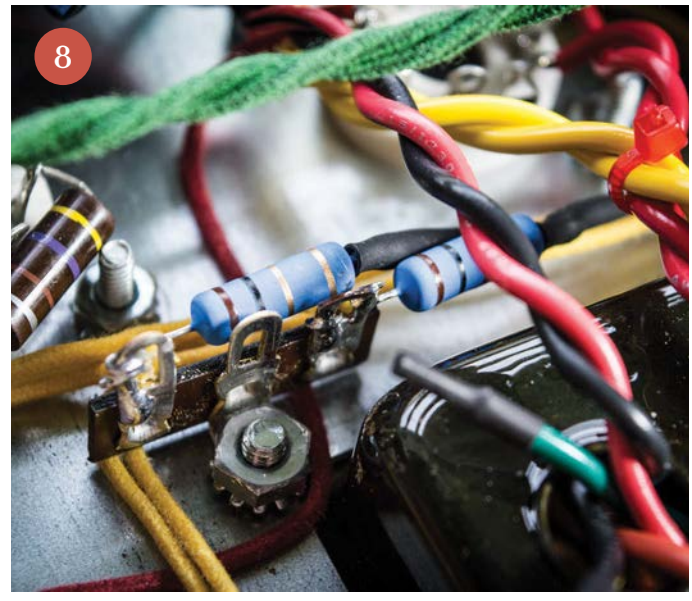
The first is grid biasing, and that's the way the Princeton Reverb is configured. If you add a grid to a diode valve it becomes a triode, and by applying a fixed negative voltage to the grid we can control the current flowing within the valve when no guitar signal is present. Setting the bias actually means fixing the negative grid voltage, and it's done using a fixed or variable resistor. This biasing method is known as 'fixed bias' and the valve's cathode is connected directly to ground. The 6V6 power valves in this amp are actually pentodes, but the explanation applies nevertheless.

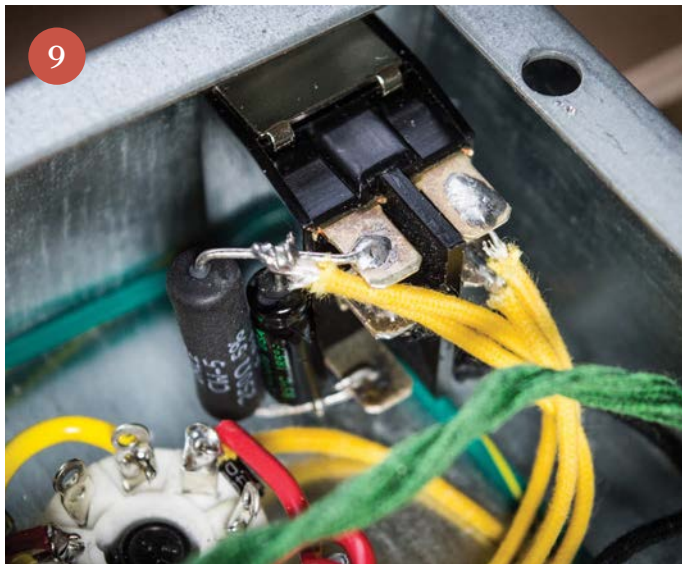
The second method is known as cathode biasing, and the power valve's cathode is connected to ground via a resistor rather than directly to ground. The resistor is usually wired in parallel with a capacitor, and no negative voltage is applied to the grid. Therefore, the cathode resistor determines how much current flows through the valve – and the higher the resistance, the lower the current.

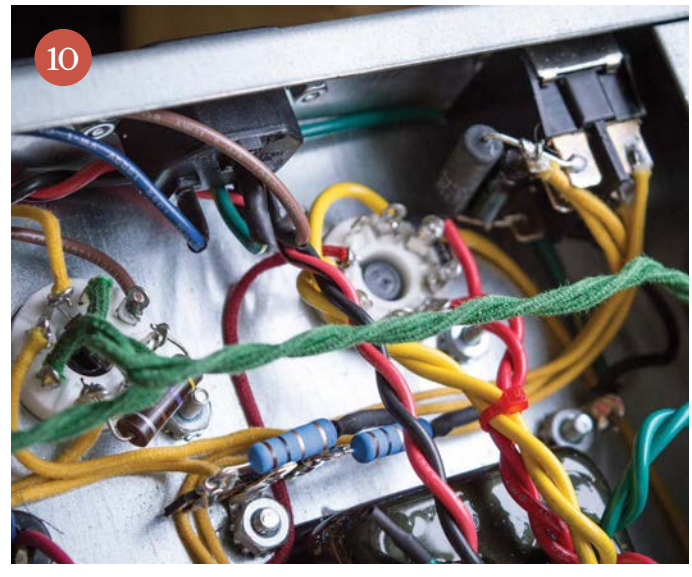
Cathode biasing is seen in tweed classics such as the Deluxe and the Vox AC10, AC15 and AC30, as well as the Marshall 18W. It's also the method chosen for the much-lauded Milkman Creamer, which is pretty much a cathode-biased Princeton Reverb. That's the theory out of the way, so now to the business of installing a fixed/cathode bias switch in our Rift PR18.

All you need is a sturdy on/on switch, a 25uF/50v capacitor, a 5W resistor and some hookup wire **5**. Although a 250-ohm resistor is









5E3 spec, you'll need around 470-ohm for a Princeton Reverb circuit. Simply refer to the diagram and photos 6, 7 & 8. I positioned the bias switch on an existing hole on the edge of the chassis 9, 10 & 11.

Flipping to cathode bias is where things get far tweedier – especially when the negative feedback is lifted. Overdrive comes on quicker, it sounds smoother and there's more of it. The midrange also fattens up, but you will notice the low end loses some of its tightness and definition.

Tremolo tuning

If you recall, a negative voltage is applied to the power valve grids in a fixed-bias arrangement. The Princeton Reverb tremolo circuit generates an oscillating voltage that is applied to the grids in combination with the bias voltage that's derived from the mains transformer. This causes the grid's negative-bias voltage to vary, which in turn affects the current flowing within the valves. In a nutshell, that's how bias tremolo works in a fixed-bias Princeton Reverb circuit, and the valve's ability to amplify a signal varies along with the bias fluctuations. The volume moves up and down at a constant speed, and players can adjust the speed and intensity of the effect.

Unfortunately, the tremolo's maximium intensity decreases dramatically when the valves are switched to cathode bias – if indeed you can hear it at all. There are modifications that can be made to the stock tremolo circuit that will make the tremolo work in cathode bias mode, but as an effect it's just about okay. When you switch back to fixed bias mode, the tremolo becomes insanely strong. After much experimentation, I decided to live without tremolo in cathode bias mode and tweak the stock tremolo instead. Two things bothered me about the Fender-style circuit – it wouldn't go slow enough and it lacked intensity.

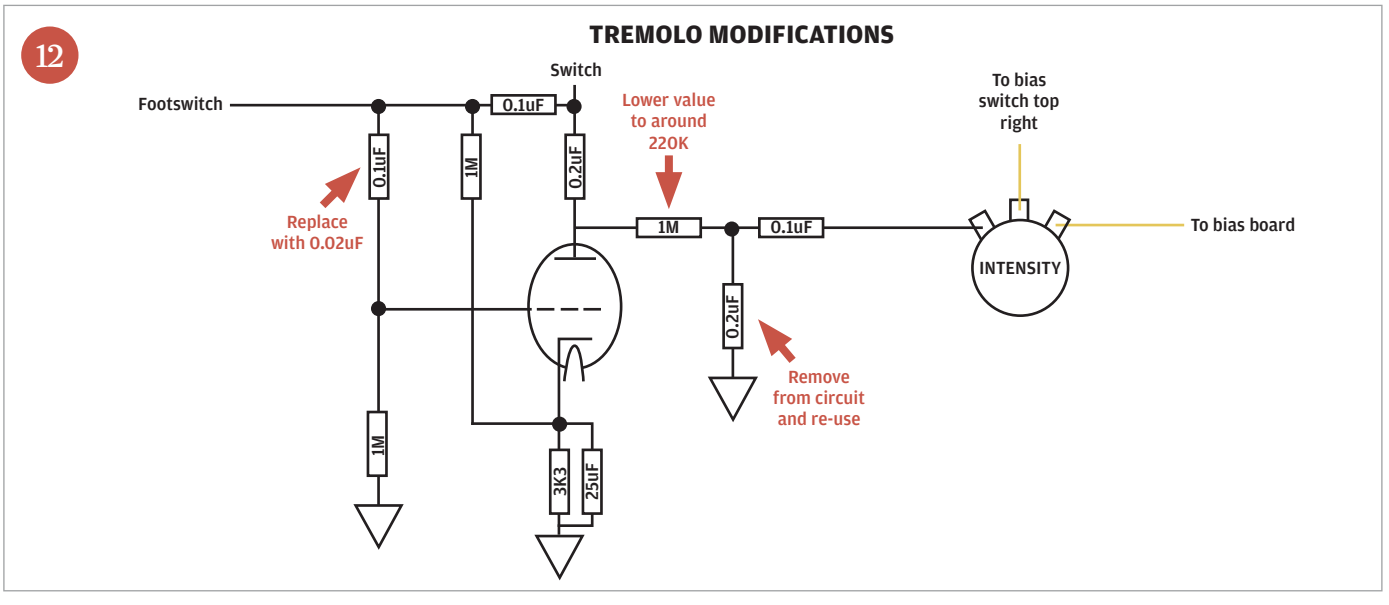
Increasing intensity is fairly easy, and I configured the Rift's tremolo more like a brownface Princeton's. If you compare the schematics, you'll notice there's a 1M resistor between the anode of the tremolo valve in a Princeton Reverb and a 0.1uF capacitor 12. Reducing the resistor value, or even bypassing it, dramatically increases intensity. Feel free to experiment with resistors until you hit on a value you like. I went with a brownface-spec >

7 It's easier to solder the components and wires to the switch before installing in the chassis

8 Two 1-ohm, 2-watt resistors are mounted on a tag strip held to the chassis by a transformer bolt

9 The switch was mounted in an unused hole in the rear corner of the chassis

10 With everything in situ, the 1-ohm resistors can be used to measure the bias in fixed bias mode



11 The right-side switch output connects back to the two 220k grid resistors located between the big 0.1uF signal capacitors

12 Getting a stronger and slower tremolo effect is easy with a few component changes

13 The three yellow Jupiter capacitors are part of the tremolo circuit, and we changed the one on the far right along with the 220k resistor immediately above

14 The brownface tonestack returns to the signal path through a 100k resistor, while the blackface stack retains the 3M3 resistor

220k, but I may up this to 330k or 470k at some point **13**.

Between the 1M resistor and 0.1uF capacitor, there's a 0.02uF capacitor that's tied to ground. It's not there in the brownface trem, and de-soldering one end of the capacitor seemed to give the Rift's trem a stronger feel. I decided to remove it, but do so carefully because it will come in useful for the next stage.

The tremolo circuit has a chain of capacitors, and the stock values are 0.01uF, 0.01uF and 0.02uF. You can slow the tremolo by swapping one or both of the 0.01uF caps to 0.02uF. I found that one change was sufficient, and I used the capacitor I removed earlier. By the time I was finished, the tremolo could sound like *Bang Bang*, a psychopath's heartbeat and all points in between.

Final touches

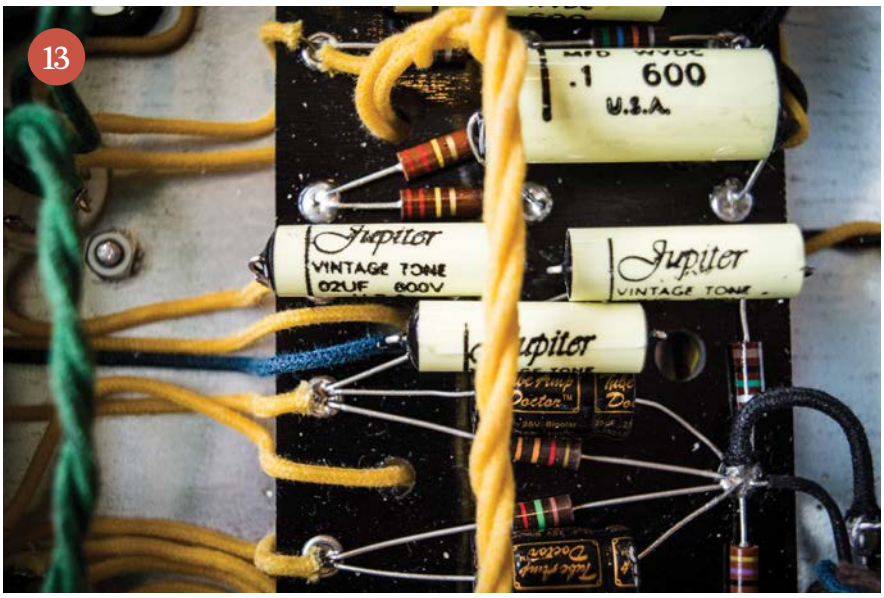
Since the first instalment, something had been bugging me about the 3.3M/10pF connection where the reverb returns to the signal path. There was quite a level difference between blackface and brownface modes and the reverb mix was also a bit skewed.

There is much confusion and contradictory information about the precise purpose of these components, but it seems they are used to mix the dry and reverb signals and to prevent the reverb from feeding back on itself at high levels. Apparently, a high resistor value is necessary because it's the only component separating the reverb's send and return, and the 10pF capacitor is there to allow high frequencies straight through.

With the reverb send moved to a point preceding the tonestack, you can reduce the 3.3M if you want more gain in Blackface mode because there is no possibility of reverb feedback. After another round of boutique bingo, I kept the 3M3 but settled on a 100k from the brownface stack and dispensed with the 10pF capacitor. To my ears, the levels between the tonestacks are nicely balanced, the reverb gels better with the dry signals and the treble response is more consistent **14**.

Calling time

The sky really is the limit when you begin modding the Princeton Reverb



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circuit and I have only scratched the surface with this project. Although it can be fun and educational to try absolutely everything, I opted to take a more focused approach and perform only mods that addressed areas that I felt might be improved.

The stated goal was to turn this Rift PR18 into an easy-to-use general-purpose Fender-style amp by configuring it for blackface, brownface and tweed tones while retaining reverb and tremolo in every mode. In blackface mode, it's still virtually a stock PR18 and all of this has been achieved with just a tonestack switch, a bias switch and a negative feedback control. I haven't even drilled any holes in the chassis.

This seems like a good place to stop and enjoy the amp for a while – at least until the editor decides it's his turn once again. I do have a few other ideas that I will doubtless try at some point, so no promises but there may well be a sequel to this project. Meanwhile, stay safe, always remove the mains plug and discharge those capacitors before touching anything inside the amp – and remember messing about with valve amps could be the death of you. Happy soldering, and once again I must thank Chris Fantana at Rift Amplification for the enthusiasm, patient help and considerable technical expertise he contributed to this project.

NEXT MONTH...

Huw takes an Allparts replacement neck and shows you how to level the frets ready for use

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PRS SE Santana & SE Custom 22

Two tasty-looking affordable Korean-made guitars that get closer to the brand's US-spec models... **ED MITCHELL** investigates

When US guitar maker Paul Reed Smith launched his Korean-made SE Series guitars back in 2001, it wasn't exactly a groundbreaking move. Practically every guitar brand, with the notable exception of Rickenbacker, has licensed Asian factories to produce affordable doppelgängers of the big-bucks stuff. What the SE range did for PRS, however, was shake the perception of its designs as high-end honeypots out of the reach of anyone but bankers, the savvy retired and born-again guitarists who've finally managed to kick the kids out of the nest.

The two models featured here, the Santana and Custom 22, are foot soldiers in the latest generation of the SE range. The former is the more-affordable descendent of Carlos Santana's signature model, the almost symmetrical double-cutaway guitar that put PRS on the map in the first place. The latter is arguably the design that we most associate with the brand, with a little splash of Fender DNA in the extended top body horn.

Before we pull these guitars apart to reveal their differences, there are a few areas where the beams cross on the spec sheets. Both feature a mahogany chassis with ribcage contouring, paired with a maple top with the edges exposed to create the illusion of binding. This textbook timber partnership is crowned with flame maple veneer to add some eye candy to the translucent finishes. We'll come to the neck material in a moment, but other shared features include rosewood fingerboards, each with a flock of iconic bird inlays, and a well-cut top nut. In the hardware dept, you'll find chunky PRS vibrato units, built like a vintage Fender vibrato on steroids, and good-quality sealed tuners. Each guitar comes with a padded PRS gigbag.

Now for the differences. The Custom 22 has a Wide Thin profile set-maple neck; the Santana's set-mahogany version comes with the Wide Fat shape with a slightly longer neck heel. The Custom 22's fingerboard radius is 10 inches. The Santana packs a flatter 11.5-inch 'board.

Looking at these guitars side by side, you'd be forgiven for assuming that they're both working with the same scale length. Nope. While the >

In the hardware dept, you'll find chunky PRS vibrato units that are built like a vintage Fender vibrato on steroids

Both guitars sport reassuringly solid PRS vibrato units

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

SE Santana

Okay, there's no vibrato but **Fret-King**'s well-priced LP-flavoured Black Label **Eclat Standard £619** pumps out the requisite humbucker tones and you get a coil-tap. You might also choose to consider the mojo-packed **Fender Classic Series '72 Tele Deluxe £769** or the even more old-school twin-humbucker **Italia Maranello '61 £969**, which comes spec'd with a licensed Bigsby B50.

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

SE Custom 22

Shredders enticed by the 22's super-fast neck profile will likely also be tempted by the **Charvel Pro Mod So-Cal SC1 £776** with its hair-metal ready twin Seymour Duncan humbuckers and double-locking Floyd Rose. There's the twin 'bucker guitar that started it all, of course, with the **Gibson Les Paul Studio £749** offering good value, while the new-for-2017 **Schecter Jinxx Recluse-FR £1,140** comes across like the 22's evil metal cousin.

Iconic bird inlays adorn both the Santana and SE Custom's rosewood fingerboards

SE Custom 22 is spec'd with a 25-inch scale, the Santana has a shorter 24.5-inch length. What difference does that half inch make to the playing experience on offer here? Stay tuned to find out.

You also get 24 fat frets on the Santana, and the '22' in the Custom's model name is a big tip-off that you're bagging two fewer frets with this guitar. The suitably named Custom 24 model is, though, available to those looking for a full two-octave 'board.

These latest models have been tweaked to a point where it's hard to see how they could possibly be improved

In use

Reaching for Carlos's baby first, it immediately feels light and well-balanced. While the neck profile is described as Wide Fat, it feels less beefy than the name would suggest, more '64 SG than '58 Les Paul. Of course, the thickness increases a bit as you make your way up to the 12th fret, but it's still not as chubby as we were expecting. The Wide Thin maple neck on the Custom 22 takes up noticeably less real estate in the palm than the Santana's section of mahogany. It has been built for speed and has an almost 80s hot rod vibe.

The biggest news on the 2017 Custom 22 is the addition of Paul Reed Smith's 85/15 humbucker set. Based on his 1985 Standard Treble and Bass pickups, these units are wired through a master volume, master tone and a three-way switch.

It might be the maple neck talking, as well as the slightly longer scale length, but the Custom 22 is a 'snappier' and brighter-sounding guitar than the Santana. Run clean, the bridge 85/15 'bucker has plenty of sparkle, yet doesn't sound brash or shrill when you give the strings a good seeing to. That clarity pays off big time when you introduce some gain. Depending on the amount of dirt involved, you run the gamut of satisfying humbucker tones – from 70s blues-rock to heavier metal stuff. Flicking to the middle and neck positions fattens up the tone as expected, and both clicks on the switch react well to warm overdrive. The clarity persists on the Custom 22's neck pickup with great note separation, but it's in this position that the SE Santana's 'bucker comes into its own. If you're a fan of Carlos's brand of sustained blues-rock lead, you'll be one happy bunny here.

The shorter scale and the neck material promote a darker, throaty tone. Kick in a Germanium fuzz box and the Santana starts to spit out random harmonics. Again, the Santana's bridge pickup doesn't sound as exuberant as the Custom 22's, but we reckon blues riffers and old-school rock aficionados will prefer its warmer voice.

We are surprised that neither guitar has a coil-split function. Some new SE models, such as the 85/15-fuelled Floyd Custom 24, have a push/pull splitter, so it seems like a missed opportunity here to reveal some single-coil tones. As you might expect, the shorter scale length makes string bending a tad easier on the Santana guitar, and you really feel that when noodling above the 12th fret. That said, we prefer the extra bottom-string tension on the slightly longer Custom 22. The Santana sounds a little 'flappy' and less distinct than the 22. If it was our guitar, we'd beef up the string gauge to .011s. You'll still enjoy comfortable string bending, but you'll get more authority in your bottom-string riffs.

Not everyone gets the appeal of PRS guitars, but that's not for the want of effort on the part of Mr Reed Smith and his cohorts. These latest models have been tweaked to a point where it's hard to see how they could possibly be improved. Playability, tone, hardware, pickups, it's all good news. Okay, the price tags are still pretty hefty, but you're getting pretty damn close to the performance of Smith's US gear without having to earn like your bank manager... or beg them for a loan.

KEY FEATURES

PRS SE Santana

- **PRICE** £849 (with padded gigbag)
- **DESCRIPTION** Solidbody six-string guitar, made in Korea
- **BUILD** Mahogany back with maple top and flame maple veneer; glued-in Wide Fat profile mahogany neck with gloss finish; rosewood fingerboard with 11.5-inch radius, bird inlays and 24 medium jumbo frets; nickel PRS vibrato and enclosed tuners
- **ELECTRICS** 2x PRS SE Santana humbuckers
- **CONTROLS** Master volume, master tone, three-way switch
- **LEFT-HANDERS** No
- **FINISH** Santana Yellow (as reviewed), Orange
- **SCALE LENGTH** 622mm/24.5"
- **NECK WIDTH** 43mm at nut, 51mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 22mm at first fret, 25mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 36mm at nut, 53mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 3.2kg/7.1lbs
- **CONTACT** PRS Europe 01223 874301 **www.prsguitars.com**

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Classic tones
+ Beautifully constructed
+ Comfortable neck profile

– The shorter scale gives it less snap than the Custom 22

This more affordable take on the guitar that kicked off the PRS story is a damn good blues-rock machine...

7/10

KEY FEATURES

PRS SE Custom 22

- **PRICE** £849 (with padded gigbag)
- **DESCRIPTION** Solidbody six-string guitar, made in Korea
- **BUILD** Mahogany back with maple top and flame maple veneer; set 'Wide Thin' profile maple neck with gloss finish; rosewood fingerboard with 10-inch radius, Bird inlays and 22 medium jumbo frets; nickel PRS vibrato and enclosed tuners
- **ELECTRICS** 2 x PRS 85/15 humbuckers
- **CONTROLS** Master volume, master tone, three-way toggle
- **LEFT-HANDERS** No
- **FINISH** Vintage Sunburst (as reviewed), Whale Blue
- **SCALE LENGTH** 635mm/25"
- **NECK WIDTH** 43mm at nut, 51mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 19mm at first fret, 22mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 36mm at nut, 53mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 3.6kg/8.1lbs

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Excellent pickups
+ Great tone and sustain
+ Looks pretty

– The Custom 22's thin neck profile won't work for everyone

Build quality is great and the pickups place the tonal palette within striking distance of its USA-born brothers

8/10

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Reverend Billy Corgan Signature & Sensei Jr

An alt-rock signature guitar and a single-pickup bruiser with added wobbles. **RICHARD PURVIS** investigates...

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Billy Corgan Signature

Offset fans willing to go with humbuckers and a hardtail bridge might also consider the highly desirable **Fano Standard JM6 £1,699**, or the highly affordable **Fender Standard Jazzmaster HH £569**.

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Sensei Jr

Who else makes a one-pickup guitar with a Bigsby? We're struggling, but your options for a rocking axe with a single P-90 include the **Fret-King Black Label Eclat DBC £729** and the **Gordon Smith GS1 60** with P-90 from **£600**. Or you could wait for Gibson to start making Juniors again...

We'd like to imagine that these instruments are made by an actual Reverend, perhaps in the vestry of a village church in Shropshire. In fact, they're designed in suburban Detroit by seasoned guitar and amplifier boffin Joe Naylor, and manufactured in Korea – but you can still use them to play hymns if you like.

Since 1997, Reverend has managed to establish itself as a successful maker whose best-known designs are quite distinct from the old Fender and Gibson templates – a rare feat. Not that history has been torn up completely: the range can be divided into bolt-on guitars with a Fender-style 25.5-inch scale, and set-neck guitars with a Gibson-style 24.75-inch scale. And here's one of each.

Billy Corgan Signature

The Smashing Pumpkins hit their critical peak before Reverend existed, but frontman Billy Corgan seems to have held on to his status as an alternative guitar hero better than his hair. Corgan's known for some quite technical soloing as well as the Big Muff-powered walls of fuzz that define *Siamese Dream*, so we're not expecting a rustic punk-plank here. He isn't much of a whammy slammer, though, so this guitar – like his signature Fender Strat of a few years back – is a hardtail.

The Railhammer pickups have the 3+3 look of Wide Range humbuckers but with a blade instead of the three polepieces on the bass side, the idea being to produce a more focused tone on the wound strings without sacrificing fullness on the other three. They've been voiced to Corgan's specifications with a bit of a midrange bump for that cutting Black Sabbath sound (he's a big Tony Iommi fan). The pickup switch is a standard three-way, but there's another way to increase your tonal options skulking within the third of those sexy chromed knobs. In addition to volume and tone, you have the option of thinning out the bottom end with a bass contour control.

This is a surprisingly rewarding guitar to play without distortion, almost Strat-like in its clucky character

This is perhaps the most satisfying execution yet of Reverend's double-cutaway bolt-on design. The raised centre section calls to mind a Firebird, while the four aluminium scratchplates look like body panels from a futuristic sportscar that never made it out of the 80s... yet the whole ensemble somehow manages to avoid coming over as naff.

This is a light guitar, in part because some of those aluminium panels are covering chambers carved out of the korina body. It has locking tuners and a graphite nut, and there are eight screws in the neck plate: six ensuring a solid join and two holding the plate to the body so it'll stay in place if you need to take the neck off. The all-maple neck is pretty shallow, and a combination of 12-inch fretboard radius and low factory action makes for easy widdling.

In use

After a quick unplugged strum – nice and breezy but with plenty of body – we head straight for the nearest Big Muff and a medley of Pumpkins riffs.

It sounds beautifully smooth and powerful, but most things do through a Muff, so we switch to something a little tamer. And whaddaya know, it still sounds beautifully smooth and powerful. With moderate gain, the bridge pickup has plenty of weight, and there's a definite bias towards vocal mids over slicing treble.

As you'd expect, there's a lot more low end in the neck pickup, and here's where the bass contour control comes in mighty handy, dialling out any mud without disembowelling the core tone. We can think of plenty of other guitars that could do with one of these.

The middle setting adds an element of chime, but it's not very characterful – vintage guitar lovers might find it a bit too hi-fi. That's even more true through a clean amp, where the tones on all three settings are sweet and refined but hardly memorable. In truth, this is to be expected from fairly high-output humbuckers; they'll certainly do for the quiet bits between high-gain sonic apocalypses, though.

Sensei Jr

Have one-pickup guitars gone out of fashion? There were no Junior models in Gibson's 2016 line-up and there's no sign of any yet for 2017... but Reverend might be able to help. The Sensei Jr has the company's own CP90 pickup, said to be slightly hotter than a vintage P-90, nestling about an inch from the bridge. Build is all-korina with a bound rosewood fretboard – and while this is another original design, the curvy shape of the scratchplate is a clear nod to Gibson's original one-pup wonder.

It's a shame Reverend stuck with tortoiseshell, though. That chilly green would look great with a white 'guard, and passable with a black one – for this writer, anything other than this slab of corned beef would have been fine. If your aesthetic sensibilities are easily offended, best stick with the natural korina finish – a much better match for crimson plastic. As with the Corgan model, you get locking tuners and a graphite nut for maximum tuning stability – handy when there's a Bigsby involved – and roller saddles to prevent snagging when you're pumping away on that arm like a diligent milkmaid.

In use

Acoustically, this one is a little more forthright in the mids, which is exactly what most of us want from a Junior. And the difference is heightened when that perky little pickup comes into play – it's rich and snappy, and responds eagerly to aggressive pick attack. Yet this is a surprisingly rewarding guitar to play without distortion, almost Strat-like in its clucky character. Surfy runs on the wound strings sound great, especially when you break out the Bigsby and a splash of spring reverb.

Slam on the overdrive and the Sensei Jr comes into its punky element. The neck doesn't feel quite as slick as the one on the Corgan guitar, but it's another fine modern player – and when you don't have a pickup switch, being able to roll off treble and bass separately is a real bonus. No, it's not as versatile as a two-pickup instrument, but within the single-pickup world, this is an impressively flexible performer.

KEY FEATURES

Billy Corgan Signature

- **PRICE** £899
- **DESCRIPTION** Solidbody guitar, made in Korea
- **BUILD** Chambered korina body, bolt-on maple neck, 12" radius maple fingerboard, 22 medium jumbo frets, graphite nut
- **HARDWARE** Through-body hardtail bridge, locking tuners
- **ELECTRICS** Two Railhammer Billy Corgan Signature humbuckers, three-way switch, master volume, tone (treble) and bass contour
- **SCALE LENGTH** 648mm/25.5"
- **NECK WIDTH** 43mm at nut, 52.5mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 21mm at first fret, 22mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 35mm at nut, 53mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 3.5kg/7.7lbs
- **FINISHES** Silver Burst (as reviewed), Pearl White, Metallic Alpine, Purple Burst (all satin)
- **CONTACT** Andertons 01483 456777 **www.andertons.co.uk** **www.reverendguitars.com**

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Original and seriously stylish looks
+ Full, powerful rock tones
+ Bass contour control is clever and useful

– Clean sounds are pretty, but will be too smooth for some

Beefy pickups, distinctive styling and an easy neck make Billy Corgan's signature guitar a fine option for progressive alt-rockers

9/10

KEY FEATURES

Sensei Jr

- **PRICE** £699 (£649 with stop tailpiece)
- **DESCRIPTION** Solidbody guitar, made in Korea
- **BUILD** Korina body, set three-piece korina neck, 12" radius rosewood fingerboard, 22 medium jumbo frets, graphite nut
- **HARDWARE** Bigsby-licensed tailpiece, tune-o-matic bridge with roller saddles, locking tuners
- **ELECTRICS** Single Reverend CP90 pickup, volume, tone (treble) and bass contour
- **SCALE LENGTH** 628mm/24.75"
- **NECK WIDTH** 43mm at nut, 53mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 21mm at first fret, 23mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 35mm at nut, 51mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 3.4kg/7.5lbs
- **FINISHES** Metallic Alpine (as reviewed), Vintage Clear, Tobacco Burst
- **CONTACT** Andertons 01483 456777 **www.andertons.co.uk** **www.reverendguitars.com**

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Plenty of P-90 character
+ Nice clean tones as well as punk-rock power
+ Controls make it more flexible than it looks

– There's a reason most guitars have multiple pickups

Big powerchords, biting lead runs, twangy riffs – this is a fun, expressive chunk of timber

8/10

Novo Guitars Serus J

Pennsylvania's answer to Midas goes for gold again.
CHRIS VINNICOMBE gives Dennis Fano's latest creation a spin...

Regular *G&B* readers will be no strangers to the name Dennis Fano. The Pennsylvania luthier's electric guitar designs have graced these pages in recent months under the banners of his former, eponymous company, his current outfit Novo and his new side-project Rivolta.

Dennis's debut Novo instrument – the Serus T – landed on UK shores a little over a year ago and went on to scoop the top prize in our 2016 Gear Of The Year awards. To say that we have high hopes for its stablemates is putting it mildly. Where the Serus T saw Dennis opt for a Tele-style configuration on an offset slab body, the Serus J betrays more of a Jazzmaster influence, thanks to its forearm and belly contours and Mastery Offset Bridge and Vibrato. Here, in aged Sonic Blue with matching headstock, it certainly cuts a dash. Like the Serus T, sweet-smelling, tempered (aka torrefied) tonewoods are the order of the day. The J's lightweight pine body has a pronounced grain that can be seen and felt through a thin nitrocellulose finish that's been scuffed and yellowed to deliver an old-guitar vibe straight out of the case. Worth around £180 in its own right, the M80-EG Hybrid Case falls somewhere between a gigbag and hardcase, and is tough and light, offering excellent protection – it's a much more practical option for the musician on the move than a vintage-style rectangular case.

In use

The Serus J doesn't just look old – its medium C-shaped tempered pine neck has a played-in feel thanks to expertly rolled rosewood board edges, while the lacquer-free back has the slinky, familiar feel of an old favourite. Like the Serus T, despite the lightweight body and large headstock, the J balances beautifully when played in a standing position.

Again, we're impressed immediately by Jerry Amalfitano's pickups. Woody, raunchy and touch-sensitive, these P-90s deliver everything you need for retro-rock, elastic R&B, 50s twang and much more. There's a nice balance across all three settings with a noticeable lift in the upper-mids when you flip to the bridge, allowing you to go from sweet to snarling in an instant.

The Mastery bridge and vibrato is threatening to become our absolute favourite whammy arrangement – the setup here feels almost hardtail-like in its stability until you wobble the bar, allowing country bends on the unwound strings to inhabit the same passage of play as shimmering vibrato with no tuning issues.

At the risk of sounding like a stuck record, Dennis Fano is in a league of his own when it comes to artfully evolved offset designs. Impressive, and very difficult to put down.

The Mastery bridge is machined beautifully and does the business, too

Guitar VERDICT

+ Wonderful neck
+ Fabulous sounds that go way beyond standard offset fare
+ Top-notch vibrato system
- Only the exchange rate prevents this from being a perfect 10

A guitar that surfs like a pro and struts like a Rolling Stone – another winner from Dennis Fano

9/10

KEY FEATURES

- **PRICE** £2,999 (inc Mono M80-EG Hybrid Case)
- **DESCRIPTION** Double-cutaway, offset-body electric. Made in USA
- **BUILD** Solid tempered pine body, bolt-on tempered maple medium C neck with 9.5" radius rosewood fingerboard with clay dot inlays. 21 Jescar 6125 frets. Unbleached bone nut
- **HARDWARE** Kluson vintage-style tuners, Mastery Offset Bridge and Vibrato
- **ELECTRICS** 2x Amalfitano P-90 pickups, Emerson 500k volume and tone pots with paper-in-oil capacitor, three-way toggle pickup selector switch
- **SCALE LENGTH** 25.5"/647.7mm
- **NECK WIDTH** 41.3mm at nut, 51.2mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 21.1mm at nut, 23.9mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 34.3mm at nut, 52.4mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 7.3lb/3.3kg
- **FINISH** Distressed Sonic Blue nitrocellulose. Over 50 colours available, see website
- **CONTACT** Coda Music 01438 350815 **www.coda-music.com** **www.novoguitars.com**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Fender's **Custom Shop Heavy Relic Jazzmaster £2,999** is the closest you'll get to the source without going vintage. The **Bilt S.S. Zaftig £2,489** throws a little Starcaster and Marauder into the mix. More affordable is the new **Fender American Professional Jazzmaster £1,539**, which features several contemporary twists.

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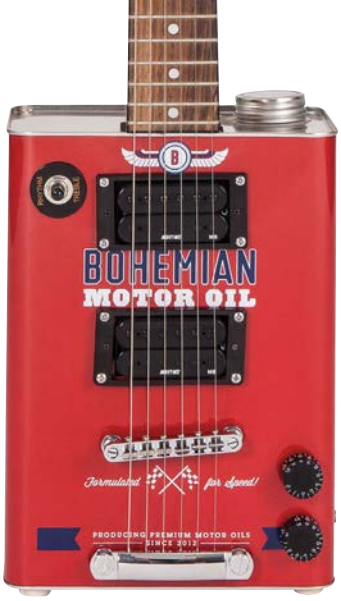

Bohemian Oil Can guitar & bass

Oil-can electrics have a long and respected pedigree. **MARCUS LEADLEY** checks out guitar and bass models from this Atlanta-based maker

Hard-up musicians have always found innovative ways of making their own instruments, often using recycled materials. Bohemian Guitars founders Adam and Shaun Lee were inspired by oil-can guitars played in the townships of their home city of Johannesburg, and the four-string Moonshine bass and six-string Motor Oil guitar are from the lower-cost Boho Series. Ironically, they're made using new cans; recycled ones take longer to source and prep.

The Motor Oil is surprisingly comfortable to play. The body is similar in depth to a dreadnought, and the acoustic vibe is backed up by the chunky scarf-jointed maple neck and paddle-style headstock. The neck's topped with a bound rosewood fretboard and the action's great. While the setup is excellent, tuning is hampered by string-creep over the nut, but this is easily remedied.

Inside the can, plywood formers provide strength. The neck timber extends to the heel of the guitar and is secured to the plywood 'top' with three large crosshead screws. The pickups are attached directly to the can's top, but the tune-o-matic and stoptail pass through and into the wood. Bohemian's guitars are billed as 'self standing' and have four rubber feet on the bottom; however, anything more than the slightest knock to the back of the headstock will send them tumbling forward.

Motor Oil guitar

Acoustically, the Motor Oil rattles a bit, but this doesn't affect the electric sound, which is seriously great! The Mighty Mite-branded humbuckers are well voiced and can deliver anything from chiming, bright rhythm tones to wig-out solo voices. The Motor Oil delivers for electric blues and rock: this is basically a semi-acoustic instrument, so you get a lot of character and resonance, and a far more complex sound than you'd expect from a solidbody in the same price bracket. All 21 frets are easily accessible, so wailing solos await.

Moonshine bass

While the Moonshine's internals are a little neater than those of the Motor Oil, they follow the same basic principles (plywood, woodscrews, glue gun…) and even with the increased tension, the instrument seems remarkably stable. Again, we have a chunky neck – probably maple, but harder to verify since it's painted rather than lacquered.

The rosewood fretboard is unbound, but still feels great. The short scale length of 30 inches makes for a classically bouncy, twangy feel and you can add vibrato to notes with ease. Whereas the Motor Oil manages fine with a three-way selector, master volume and tone controls, the Moonshine Bass has independent pickup volumes and a master tone, to blend your pickup outputs.

The Moonshine is also a real tone monster, with a little metallic clank present in the amplified sound – especially when you play harder and snap the strings a little. This results in some raucous voices that can really propel a track forward, yet there's enough tonal control to go deep and dubby for some great reggae bass sounds – while adding distortion results in a dangerous and evil brew.

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE

Township Guitars of Cape Town has fine oil-can instruments at around the **$400** mark. Cigar boxes get turned into instruments, too – check out **Drummond + Hammett** for a range of four- and six-string guitars, starting at around **£200**. For the hollow, metal-body vibe, **James Trussart** is the undisputed master – but prices start around **£3,000**.

KEY FEATURES

Bohemian Oil Can Motor Oil guitar

- **PRICE** £249 (no case)
- **DESCRIPTION** Six-string electric guitar, made in China
- **BUILD** Oil-can body with plywood internal bracing, screw-mounted maple neck with 21-fret bound rosewood fingerboard
- **HARDWARE** Tune-o-matic bridge with stoptail, individual machineheads
- **ELECTRICS** 2x Mighty Mite humbucker pickups, master tone and volume controls, 3-way pickup selector
- **SCALE LENGTH** 25.5"/647mm
- **NECK WIDTH** 44mm at nut, 53mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 22mm at first fret, 23mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 35.2mm at nut, 52mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 6lbs/2.72kg
- **LEFT-HANDERS** No
- **FINISHES** Red Motor Oil graphic
- **CONTACT** JHS 01132 865381 **www.jhs.co.uk**

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Great-sounding guitar
+ Eye-catching looks
+ Pleasingly chunky neck
- The can body is prone to dings, dents and scratches
- Not a very ergonomic body style, due to the oil-can format

This is a great-sounding guitar that's easy to play. It won't be to all tastes, but the Motor Oil is ideal for anyone looking for something a bit different

7/10

KEY FEATURES

Bohemian Oil Can Moonshine bass

- **PRICE** £269 (no case)
- **DESCRIPTION** Four-string electric bass, made in China
- **BUILD** Oil-can body with plywood internal bracing, screw-mounted maple neck with 19-fret bound rosewood fingerboard
- **HARDWARE** Adjustable bridge, individual machineheads
- **ELECTRICS** 2x single-coil bass pickups, master tone and independent volume controls, 3-way pickup selector
- **SCALE LENGTH** 30"/760mm
- **NECK WIDTH** 42mm at nut, 57.2 mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 23mm at first fret, 25mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 34mm at nut, 57.2mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 6lbs/2.72kg
- **LEFT-HANDERS** No
- **FINISHES** Grey Moonshine graphic

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Great-sounding bass
+ Short scale length
+ Pleasingly chunky neck
- Prone to falling over – we recommend you use a proper stand
- Will feed back at higher levels

If you're looking for a short-scale bass to provide an alternative sound, or because you have smaller hands, this Bohemian is a novel-looking option that can still be taken seriously

7/10

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Orange Rocker 15 & 32

A circuit from Orange's recent past is reimagined in stereo. **CHRIS VINNICOMBE** grabs and goes...

Launched in the mid-noughties, the popular Orange Rocker 30 came in head or combo form and delivered 30 watts from a pair of EL34 power valves running in Class A. Although discontinued and superseded by the TH30 in 2010, Orange still receives enquiries about the original Rocker, so the company's technical director Adrian Emsley decided to revisit it.

For 2017, the Rocker is reimagined in the shape of a pair of combos, this time with EL84 power stages. The Rocker 15 is a compact 15-watt 1x10, while the 32 is a 2x10 that kicks out 30 watts in stereo. Like their forebear, both amps feature two channels; the first, entitled Natural, is governed by just a single volume control and is designed to be clean and transparent until power-stage overdrive kicks in. The Dirty channel has gain and master volume controls either side of a three-band EQ.

As well as requests to resurrect the Rocker, there was also demand for Orange to release a one-watt valve amp for home use, so Adrian decided to incorporate a bedroom/headroom switch into the new Rocker 15. This means that as well as switching between 15- and seven-watt full- and half-power modes on the top panel, another chunky toggle switch around the back takes this down to one or 0.5 watts in 'bedroom' mode.

The 32 is the bigger brother and intended primarily for live use, so there's no bedroom/headroom switch, but it is switchable between 30 and 15 watts and feature-packed nonetheless. Designed around a pair of 15-watt output stages, with one effects send and two returns, when using the left return alone the amp operates in mono. Using the second return as well causes the signal to split into stereo, so if you are one of the many pedal addicts who use stereo delay, modulation, reverb or all of the above, the Rocker 32 allows you to bring stereo soundscapes to the stage with a very compact footprint.

Even if you are using the Rocker 32 in mono, thanks to some clever engineering, the amp still has a more three-dimensional voice than most 2x10s. One side of the Rocker 32 has a cathode follower after the effects return, while the other is anode following. The cathode follower hits >

There's plenty of chime and harmonic complexity, and a raw and moreish overdrive as you crank the amp

The Rocker 32's stereo returns will appeal to ambient pedal addicts

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Orange Rocker 15

Fender's **Blues Junior** **£589** is the quintessential grab-and-go 15-watt valve combo, and it's used by a surprising number of pro players, too. Check out the Lacquered Tweed version, which comes with 50s cosmetics and a 12-inch Jensen C12N speaker. The **Vox AC10C1** **£426** is a single-channel EL84-powered 10-watt 1x10 combo with reverb, plenty of chime and a wide gain range.

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Orange Rocker 32

There aren't a great deal of stereo 2x10 guitar combos around, but if you aren't bothered about valves then **Blackstar**'s **ID:Core Stereo 150** **£329** offers a vast array of functionality for the money and has some impressive sounds onboard, too. If cash isn't an issue, check out the **Magnatone Panoramic Stereo Combo** **£2,449**, which delivers 12+12 watts of stereo EL84 power through a pair of 10-inch ceramic speakers and offers onboard pitch-shifting vibrato, tremolo and spring reverb.

The Rocker 32 offers 30- and 15-watt power modes

Both amps have vintage-style 'Pics Only' panels but this soon becomes second nature

its power amp at a lower impedance than the anode follower; what this means in practice is that one side of the 2x10 has a faster and tighter response, while the other is softer and more compressed. In addition, it's also possible to patch mono effects into just one side in 'wet/dry' mode to create better separation, with the effected signal appearing in one speaker and your dry signal in the other.

Both amps utilise Orange's 10-inch Voice Of The World speakers which, at over 100dB, offer plenty of punch when playing with a drummer. The exterior of both combos is characterised by compact but stout cabinetry and the company's classic livery, and while the glyphs Orange employs for its volume, gain and EQ controls might take a little bit of getting used to, they soon become second nature.

Internal construction is neat and rugged, with one main PCB home to the lion's share of the components and the valve bases, while the speaker output, FX loop and footswitch jack sockets live on a smaller satellite board.

In use

This writer has long been a fan of Adrian's EL84 amps in combination with PAF-style pickups, and the little Rocker 15 is no exception. With our battle-worn 2003 ES-335 currently sporting a pair of Tyson Tone TTL-1 vintage PAF clones, plugging into the 15's Natural channel is a joy. There's plenty of chime and harmonic complexity and a raw and moreish overdrive as you crank the amp, with willing musical feedback. If Neil Young had been born just inside the M25, his guitar tone would sound something like this. It's a lot of fun with a Telecaster, too, and sounds nicely Stones-y with the volume just past noon.

There's no EQ, of course, so suddenly those oft-neglected controls on your guitar become your most powerful tone-shaping tools. Yet because the various power settings on offer allow you to make your chosen level of break-up work in a variety of spaces, it's a surprisingly versatile single-knob channel that would make for a very cool little amp in its own right. It's also loud for its size, aided by the efficient 10-inch speaker that's certainly not short on bass in a band situation.

Switch over to the Dirty channel and you get a fierce British rock tone with a slightly fuzzy texture that is distinctly Orange – it's not going to please Santana fans, but for aggressive rock 'n' roll it's a killer voice that carves out a space in the mix with authority. Lower-power high-gain settings can get a little fizzy if you are not careful, but at gig levels the Rocker 15 is glorious and absolutely loves a Gibson with a pokey bridge pickup. It's tighter and more controlled than the looser overdrive of the natural channel, too. What a cool little amp!

Switching to the Rocker 32, most of what we've said about the voicing of the 15 applies, but here it's delivered with greater depth, volume, spread and punch. It's a gutsy beast, but crucially there's the headroom and stereo connectivity to allow pedal addicts more freedom.

At gig volume, it excels with a richness and aggression that's much more three-dimensional than most amps in its class. And even in half-power mode, it has the necessary extra spread and punch to deliver on stages that might be a little too big for the 15.

Stereo effects really do sound impressively immersive in the loop – if you tend to get your drive kicks from your pedalboard, then setting up the Dirty channel as a second clean 'base' tone works really well. There are some beautiful chiming Vox-y clean sounds available on both sides that are reminiscent of the old single-channel Orange AD30.

Flipping between channels doesn't feel like a step change in the way that channel-switching amps sometimes can – here, it's a more organic shift than that. Take a few steps back and drink the sound in: it's expansive, room-filling stuff. Who needs 12-inch speakers, eh?

KEY FEATURES

Orange Rocker 15

- **PRICE** £599
- **DESCRIPTION** Two-channel Class A valve combo, manufactured in China
- **POWER RATING** 15/7/1/0.5 watts switchable
- **VALVES** 2x EL84 (power amp), 3x 12AX7, 1x 12AT7 (preamp)
- **CONTROLS** Natural channel: volume. Dirty channel: gain, bass, middle, treble, master volume
- **CONNECTIONS** FX send and return, 2x 8- and 1x 16-ohm speaker outputs, footswitch input
- **SPEAKER** 1x 10-inch Voice Of The World Gold Label
- **DIMENSIONS** 470(w)x410(h) x260mm(d)
- **WEIGHT** 13.6kg/29.9lbs
- **CONTACT** OMEC 020 8905 2828 **www.orangeamps.com**

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ A big bark from a small box
+ Versatile power switching
+ The Natural channel could be a very good amp in its own right
– 'Pics Only' control panel may be confusing at first

The Rocker 15 sounds really good at home, sings at gigging levels and won't kill you if you have to carry it up a flight of stairs

9/10

KEY FEATURES

Orange Rocker 32

- **PRICE** £829
- **DESCRIPTION** Two-channel Class A stereo valve combo, manufactured in China
- **POWER RATING** 30/15 watts switchable
- **VALVES** 4x EL84 (preamp), 4x 12AX7, 2x 12AT7 (preamp)
- **CONTROLS** Natural channel: volume. Dirty channel: gain, bass, middle, treble, master volume
- **CONNECTIONS** Left and right 16-ohm speaker outputs, FX send, stereo returns, footswitch input
- **SPEAKER** 2x 10-inch Voice Of The World Gold Labels
- **DIMENSIONS** 580(w)x460(h) x290mm(d)
- **WEIGHT** 23.3kg/44.7lbs

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Beautiful chime and aggressive crunch
+ Lush stereo performance in a compact cabinet
+ Excellent-sounding 10-inch speakers
– Access to rear connections fiddly on a dimly lit stage

An excellent-sounding amp that brings stereo effects connectivity to a sensible footprint for gigging

9/10

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VICTORY
INPUT I
INPUT II
VOLUME I
VOLUME II
TREBLE
MIDDLE
BASS
PRESENCE
MASTER
OFF
PREHEAT
ON
The
Sheriff 22
VICTORY

Victory Sheriff 22

Promising era-spanning British rock tones at realistic volume levels with built-in attenuation, Victory's Sheriff 22 is new in town. **HUW PRICE** saddles up...

Brit amp builder Victory's 'skeleton chassis' has become a familiar sight, and its design was a collaborative effort with Guthrie Govan. The idea was to make Govan's V30 The Countess amp compact and light so it could be stowed away in overhead lockers on aeroplanes, and the concept has been carried over to various other Victory amp models.

This Sheriff 22 arrived in a fitted lightweight carry case, which comes as standard. It also came with an upright 2x12 closed-back cabinet, designated the V212VH. Containing two Celestions – a Vintage 30 and a G12H Anniversary – the top, bottom and sides are made from pine with a plywood back and baffle. It looks formidable and feels rock solid, but it's only 23kg in weight and the dimensions (485x700x295mm) add up to a reasonably easy lift.

The claimed 28-watt power rating from a pair of EL84s may raise a few eyebrows, but mostly because we're more accustomed to cathode-biased EL84 amps such as a Vox AC15 or Marshall 18W. The Sheriff 22 has fixed-bias power valve circuitry running in class AB, and there are bias test points and a recessed bias adjustment control on the back panel. The recommended setting is 22mV, with 2mV leeway either side. The review amp readings were 23.7mV and 24.3mV, so it was biased slightly hot.

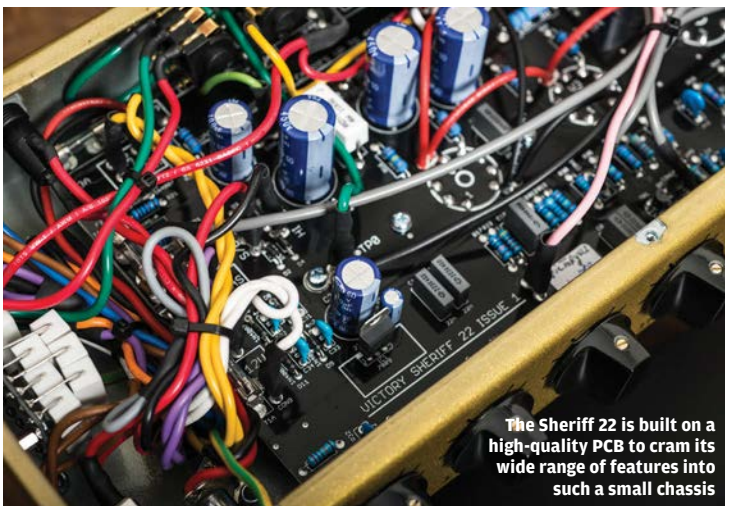
Despite the apparent simplicity of Sheriff's layout, there are some unusual features. A channel switching box is provided, but there's no footswitch socket. The footswitch plugs into input one on the front panel and you plug your guitar into input two. On the back panel, there's a pre-attenuated 0.3-watt output that can feed speakers rated from 4-16 ohms. There's also a bypassable effects loop.

In use

Well, Victory did promise British tones, and that's precisely what you get. The sonic signature is utterly unmistakable, and if that's your sort of thing the Sheriff 22 will plaster a smile all over your face regardless of which channel you start with or where the controls are set. With all the controls at noon, input one sounds cleaner, clearer and more sparkly than input two. However, without any significant difference in level, the overdrive already starts to become apparent through input two and the tonal characteristic has an underlying gritty growl in the midrange.

Input one provides a surprising amount of clean headroom. With a Strat, it's mellow Hendrix in a box. Clean chords glisten in the treble and you get bell-like lows with a sweet attack rather than the painful transient spike that blights some Brit 'classics'. >

Victory promised British tones and that's precisely what you get. The sonic signature is utterly umistakable



The Sheriff 22 is built on a high-quality PCB to cram its wide range of features into such a small chassis

KEY FEATURES

- **PRICE** £799 (inc case)
- **DESCRIPTION** Two-channel fixed-bias valve head, built in the UK
- **POWER RATING** 0.3W/28W
- **VALVES** 4x 12AX7, 2x EL84
- **CONTROL PANEL** 2x input sockets, volume 1, volume 2, treble, middle, bass, presence, master, power/standby
- **REAR PANEL** 2x 8-ohm & 1x 16-ohm speaker outputs, 0.3W low-power output (4/8/16-ohm), bypassable effects loop, valve bias test points and adjustment control
- **SPEAKER** The 212VH cabinet pictured is £549 and comes loaded with Celestion Vintage 30 and G12H Anniversary speakers
- **DIMENSIONS** 342x185x185mm
- **WEIGHT** 6.5kg/14.3lbs
- **CONTACT** Victory Amplification **www.victoryamps.com**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...
The **EVH 5150III £456** is another dual-EL84 amp that promises higher gain but is rated at 15W. With three channels, a built-in stepped attenuator and an FX loop, the **Bogner Atma £1,649** generates 18W from a pair of EL84s. **Engl**'s **E606 Ironball Head £719** uses two EL84s for 20W with a TMB tonestack, presence, switchable attenuation, direct recording output, reverb, headphone output and FX loop.

Get the volume to around 1 o'clock and the overdrive really kicks in, but beyond 3 o'clock it goes beyond a joyous roar into something a bit looser and more ragged. This is the overdrive zone that crosses into input two territory – where you might be better off anyway. In addition to more available gain, there's a lift in the upper-mid crunch frequencies along with a subtle dip in the low mids that tightens the low strings without detracting from the bass weight.

Input two has a more aggressive tone that's certainly more 'modern' than the 60s voicings of input one, but nothing like the metallic crunch of a West Coast-style amp. It's more about compressed sustaining legato lead lines, articulate bite and hard rock grind than contemporary metal.

The overdrive never degenerates into the extremes of fizzy fuzz tones, and some drop tuners might struggle to achieve the extremely taught definition they need with high-output humbuckers. It's a fantastic-sounding channel for harder blues-rock, classic metal and more besides, but you should be aware of its limitations.

Getting back to input one, we found the playing experience more tactile and involving because notes gel so elegantly under overdrive. When you dial in the sweet spot, the lows have a percussive bounce and the upper-mids compress under attack to encourage you to dig in with your plectrum or even fingers.

With a Strat or Les Paul, you'll stumble effortlessly upon a raft of classic tones from SRV to Bloomfield, Kossoff and beyond. Much of this is down to an unusually powerful middle control and, if you want to get deeper into it, you may find that the presence can be used – in conjunction with the treble – to hone bass definition and playing feel.

With a Strat or Les Paul, you'll stumble upon a raft of classic tones from SRV to Bloomfield, Kossoff and beyond

Under normal circumstances, we would be delighted about having the low power output option but, as with most other attenuators when they're pushed hard, an off-putting grittiness is apparent. The problem – if you can call it that – is the master volume feature. Basically, it's so effective it almost renders the low-output feature superfluous because the tone sounds better at equivalent level settings to us.

The master volume comes after the phase inverter in the signal path, and enhances the amp's tone and usability. With heavier overdrive, we found a sweet spot around 3 o'clock, where backing off the master puts the lows into sharper focus. It then gently shaves off level until that pesky Fletcher-Munson thing happens and the frequency extremes roll off towards the bottom of the master's range. Fortunately, the tonestack compensates here.

Two-channel amps often go pear-shaped when the designer tries to achieve too broad a range of tones and gain levels. You may have played amps where the clean channel sounds sterile and the overdrive channel dives straight into fizzy distortion. It was fine when guitarists felt compelled to switch from squeakily anodyne funk tones to super-saturated shred, but for most of us that era was over by the arse end of the 80s.

When two channels are sharing the same tonestack, valves, transformers and speakers, success is more likely to be achieved when the designer shoots for two closely related, complementary voicings. By doing so, Sheriff 22 designer Martin Kidd has achieved an idealised take on a wide range of classic Marshall tones. Additionally, there are features that enhance this amp's functionality and playability without compromising character and allow you to dial it in at 21st century levels.

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Impressive Brit tones
+ Wide gain range
+ Refined treble
+ Outstanding master volume

– FX loop not footswitchable
– Gritty breakup from low-power output

Victory has packed some undeniably great tones into this affordable lunchbox amp – the Sheriff thoroughly deserves its award badge

9/10

Rich Robinson Signature 'Magpie Salute'

Teye® Guitars

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The first Teye Signature is for a man we respect very much as a player and as a person, and with whom we go way back: **Rich Robinson**, who has been playing Teyes since 2012.
We're very excited to introduce this guitar especially since our Super-T model recently won the GPM's EDITORs' PICK!

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FAITH BLOOD MOON VENUS £929
ACOUSTIC GUITAR

Faith Blood Moon Venus

The Blood Moon Series will eventually be the entry level for all-solid Faith guitars, but at present there's only one model. **HUW PRICE** finds out if the Venus will purr...

Regular readers will be more than familiar with Faith acoustics, designed in Shropshire by Patrick James Eggle. On first glance, you might assume this particular Faith is made from koa, but the body is actually built using all-solid trembesi wood from Indonesia. It's a new one for this reviewer, but it does crop up on guitars and ukuleles with some regularity. Also known as rain tree and monkey pod wood, trembesi is popular, too, amongst furniture makers for the undeniable beauty of its colour and grain. Contrary to some claims, it is not related to mahogany or rosewood – and that's just fine.

Faith has previously named an entire series after this timber, but the Trembesi Series models all feature spruce tops. Currently, the Venus is the only model in the Blood Moon Series, and the distinguishing feature is the use of trembesi for the soundboard as well as the back and sides. We can only presume the name was inspired by the deep crimson brown hue and Faith's intention was to create a new look and sound. It's also the entry level to Faith's all-solid-wood guitars, but there's nothing 'budget' about the way the Venus looks. In fact, this is a visually arresting guitar all round.

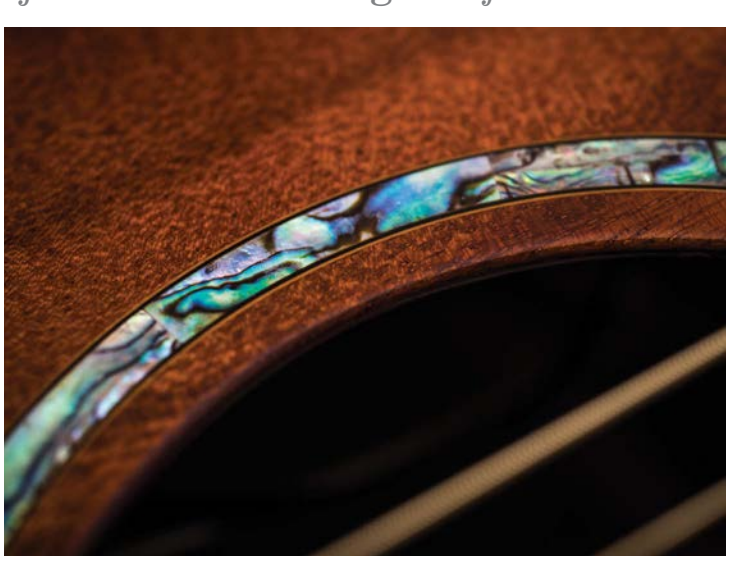
An impressive gloss finish enhances the grain pattern of the trembesi and the flame maple body binding. The binding and purfling are executed to near perfection and the green and blue of the abalone rosette gleam jewel-like within its fibre borders.

The neck presents something of a contrast in feel and appearance – Faith has opted for a profile that will be familiar to anyone with previous experience of the brand.

The 12th-fret inlay and headstock logo are both white pearl and the back of the neck has a satin finish. Carved crisply, the heel is stacked in three layers with impressive grain matching and the headstock is scarf jointed.

Figured Macassan ebony is used for the bridge, bridge pins and bound fingerboard. This isn't the flat black stuff, so you can see some grain lines, >

The binding and purfling are executed to near perfection and the green and blue of the abalone rosette gleam jewel-like



KEY FEATURES

- **PRICE** £929
- **DESCRIPTION** All-solid electro-acoustic six-string Om/auditorium-size guitar, made in Indonesia
- **BUILD** Solid trembesi top, back and sides, mahogany neck, Macassan ebony bridge, rosewood fingerboard, rosewood peghead overlay and truss-rod cover, 14th-fret neck join, gold-plated Grover Rotomatic die-cast tuners, Tusq nut and saddle, ebony bridge pins with abalone dots and abalone rosette
- **ELECTRICS** Shadow Performer tuner & preamp with Shadow Nanoflex pickup
- **LEFT-HANDERS** No
- **FINISH** Clear sunburst gloss body, satin neck
- **SCALE LENGTH** 645mm/25 3/8"
- **NECK WIDTH** 42mm at nut, 53mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 20mm at first fret, 23mm at ninth fret
- **STRING SPACING** 37mm at nut, 55mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 2.12kg/4.68lbs
- **CONTACT** Faith Guitars C/O Barnes & Mullins Ltd 01691 652449 **www.faithguitars.com**

The headstock logo, like the 12th-fret inlay, is white pearl

It's easy to see why trembesi has become popular for its attractive colour and grain

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...
The **Levinson LGC-22 MVT £902** is an all-solid mahogany concert-size cutaway with a Fishman Matrix VT pickup system. **Tanglewood**'s **TW47 E £848** has a cutaway, solid sapele body with a B-Band A3T pickup system and gold Grover tuners.

and the deep dark brown is arguably a better match for the trembesi. Rosewood is preferred for the peghead overlay and heel cap, and both are gloss-finished.

Tusq is used for the nut and compensated saddle. As usual, these are one-size-fits-all items, as you'd expect to find in the world of modern large-scale guitar manufacturing, but to be fair the fit in this instance is a lot better than most.

On the upper bout, you'll find the control panel for the Shadow Performer tuner and preamp. The controls include bass, treble, phase, volume and a tuner activation switch with multi-segment display. This preamp combines with a Shadow Nanoflex pickup under the saddle, and the battery compartment can be accessed externally.

In Use

The review guitar arrived with a humidifier installed in the soundhole. Removing it proved to be quite a tricky operation, so we'd advise requesting an in-store demonstration.

With its medium/low action, the playability certainly can't be faulted and the octave intonation check reveals all is good. But perhaps more importantly for a guitar that's most likely destined for a lot of cowboy chord activity, the nut slots are cut properly.

This means they're low enough for the notes to fret on-pitch without the open strings buzzing against the first fret, and it's possibly even more important than getting the saddle position millimetre-perfect if you'll be playing mostly open chords. It's important for the timbre, too, when you can tune up, strum through an E major and the harmonics all gel into a harmonious whole. That's precisely what you get with the Blood Moon Venus.

There's an easygoing mellowness that remains dynamic without being spiky, yet compresses slightly

The overall tonal characteristic is evenly balanced, although the coated bronze strings, with which all Faith guitars ship, contribute a slightly metallic sheen over the treble and upper-mids. The bass is full without being chest-thumpingly deep, and there's an even transition across the midrange. Although it's difficult to make a definitive assessment of the tonal characteristics of trembesi from just one guitar, we would suggest mahogany-like mids with slightly more extended treble. Trembesi bass isn't quite as soft and woody, but it has a similarly strong fundamental, albeit with extra harmonic overtones.

We find it very easy to make this guitar sound good. There's an easygoing mellowness that remains dynamic without being spiky, yet compresses slightly to encourage a player to dig in. Some may seek a little more sheer volume and bass power, but for general strumming and picking duties in standard tuning the Blood Moon Venus ticks every box.

Things are a bit less positive in dropped tunings, as low D and C notes become submerged by the higher strings and things lose focus fast. Maybe a heavier-gauged set might help to bolster or even increase the low-end response, but hardcore fingerstylists may find this characteristic a tad restricting. So, overall, the acoustic response is balanced, player-friendly and enjoyable without conveying an especially strong or distinctive sonic character.

Faith's pickup systems emphasise functionality and simplicity, and over the years we've come to expect very palatable electro-acoustic tones. This system veers well away from the brittle artificiality of so many piezo systems and produces a balanced tone that resembles the guitar's acoustic tone. Through a flat-response system, we felt the need to roll off the treble and bass slightly, but very little tweaking was required and we were able to get loud without feedback issues.

The Venus Blood Moon is an attractive, properly made and well-finished guitar. Many players prefer and require a cutaway and a fully featured pickup system, and to get both on an all-solid professional-grade acoustic for under a grand makes this a very interesting proposition.

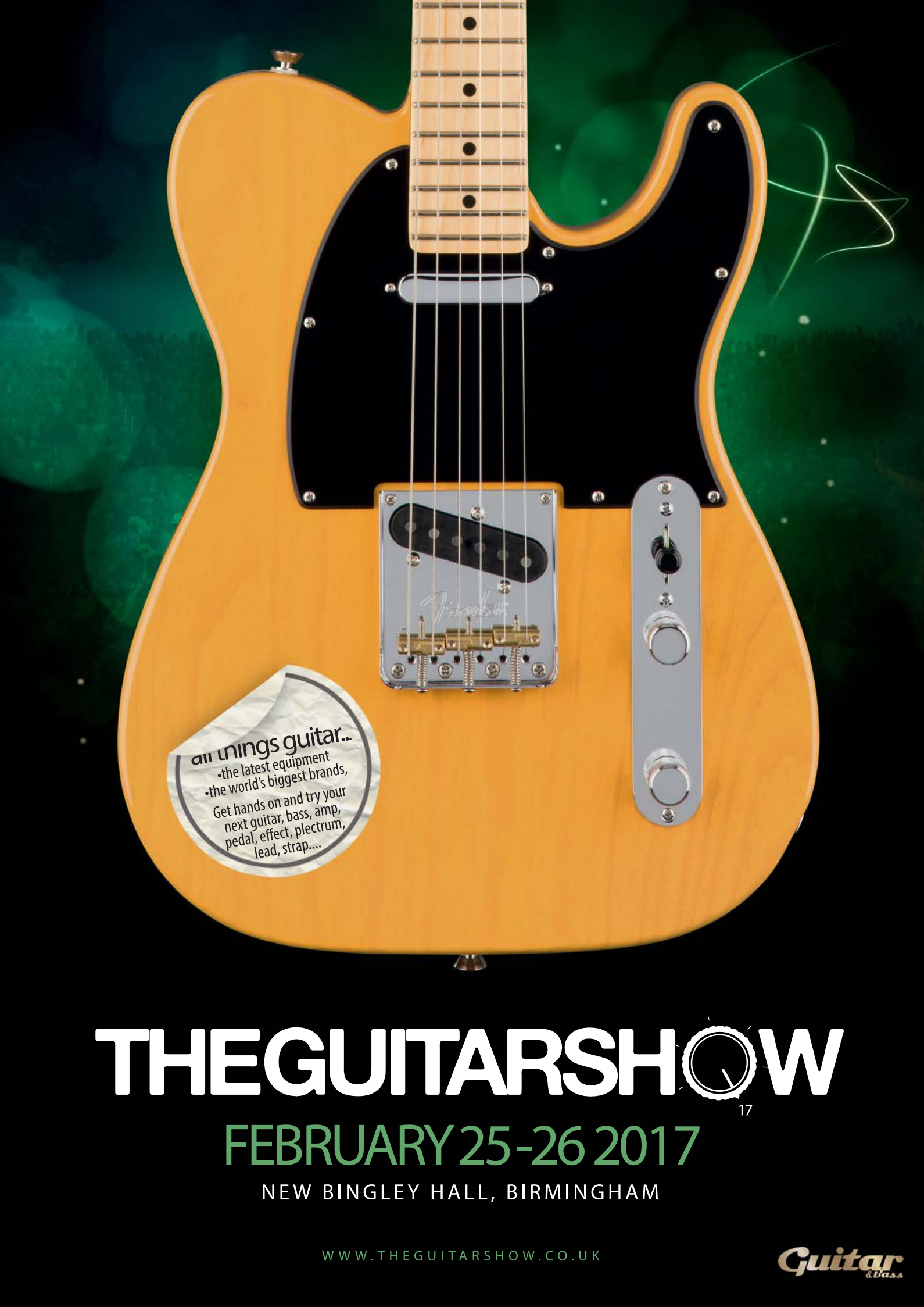
Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Eye-catching looks
+ Easy playability
+ Excellent pickup system
+ Good build quality

- Bass lacks depth
- Not as bright as spruce

Good looks, easy playability, a cutaway and a decent-sounding pickup system make the Blood Moon a professional-grade all-round electro-acoustic at a competitive price

8/10



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Strymon Riverside Multistage Drive

If overdrive is the final frontier for digital effects, then Strymon is the Starship Enterprise. Beam us up, **RICHARD PURVIS...**

We're big fans of Strymon's delay, reverb and modulation pedals – they're well made, ingenious and filled with useful and inventive functions. But the challenge with digital processing is always to match the warm, organic feel of analogue effects... and while Strymon and others are getting really good at that, emulating tape wobble is not the same as capturing the soul of a really good overdrive. This is a whole new challenge for the Californian kings of pristine digital performance.

Actually, the Riverside is not an entirely digital effect – the first gain stage is a JFET. But everything that happens to your signal after that, until it's converted back to analogue on its way out, is down to a SHARC processor. The main advantage of doing it this way is versatility – there's no modelling of different overdrive types here, but as well as a three-band EQ section you get toggle switches for high- and low-gain circuits and a midrange push option, plus a three-way presence switch on the back. Holding down the bypass switch allows for tweaks to two more hidden toys: a noise gate and, if you have an external footswitch, an in-built boost of up to 6dB.

Even the drive control is not as simple as it looks – Strymon has used 'continuously variable circuit tuning' to allow a bunch of other factors, as well as the gain itself, to change as you crank it, so in theory you're always in the sweet spot. Oh, and the left footswitch allows you to store and recall a preset, meaning you can tap dance between two different sounds.

In use

It's technically illegal to let anything come between a Telecaster and a good blackface amp, but at low gain levels the Riverside makes a strong first impression. It roughs up the clean tone in a sweetly furry way, with plenty of clarity and no loss of touch-sensitivity. Flicking down the push switch adds a hearty helping of extra gain with the emphasis on chunky mids, but it still sounds completely natural and more or less transparent. What it certainly doesn't sound is digital.

Flicking down the push switch adds a hearty helping of extra gain. What it certainly doesn't sound is digital

Still in low-gain mode, but with the drive close to full, snarly upper-mids begin pushing their way to the fore – and when we flip to high gain, with an eager Les Paul taking over while the Tele has a lie down – the harmonic saturation gets as intense as most of us will ever need. It's still fundamentally well behaved, with no blooming in the low end or screeching in the highs, and the tightly grinding midrange has something of a JCM800 flavour.

If that aggressive voice starts to grate, however, there's not much you can do about it. The tonestack lets you scoop things out to an extent, but none of those knobs and switches will really round out the lower mids, and at high gain levels it just isn't possible to make the Riverside sound as big and smooth as our favourite analogue drives. So if you're looking for the 'tweed' switch, you should probably be looking for another pedal... but we suspect classic-rock and 80s metal fans might not mind that too much.

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Impressively 'analogue' tones, especially at low gain levels
+ Lots of sound-tweaking options
+ Preset switch is a handy live tool

- High-gain voice not to all tastes
- Many top-end boutique drives are cheaper

It might not convert analogue connoisseurs, but this is stadium rock in a box – with some useful extra controls

8/10

KEY FEATURES

Strymon Riverside

- **PRICE** £299
- **DESCRIPTION** Digital overdrive pedal, made in USA
- **CONTROLS** Drive, level, bass, middle, treble; toggle switches for high/low gain and normal or pushed mids; three-way presence switch; favorite footswitch for recalling preset; secondary mode for drive and level knobs to control noise reduction threshold and boost level
- **FEATURES** 24-bit 96kHz A/D & D/A converters; switchable true or buffered bypass; inputs for boost footswitch and expression pedal
- **DIMENSIONS** 116x101x62mm
- **CONTACT** Music Psych 020 7607 6005 **musicpsych.com** **strymon.net**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE

The first stompbox to make digital overdrive truly viable was the **Line 6 DM4**, and it's still available for around **£210**. A more recent take on the idea is the **Source Audio Soundblox 2 Multiwave Distortion £150**, while those seeking digi-style flexibility in a fully analogue pedal might try the **Elektron Analog Drive £349**.

Guitar-Bass NET

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Guitar & Bass AWARD EXCELLENCE 10/10

Fane Acoustics Ascension A60

Fane may be a brand with a rich heritage, but it has been developing some very interesting new speakers. **HUW PRICE** tests a potential giant-killer...

Fane's Ascension Series includes two alnico magnet guitar speakers rated at 90- and 60-watts power handling. This month, we're featuring the 'medium-power' A60 with its cream paintwork and cheekily familiar basket and bell cover shapes.

Sensitivity is high and there's a 1.75-inch diameter voice coil and a relatively thin paper cone with light ribbing. We are pleased to see various different sizes of tags for spade connectors, but it you prefer you can solder instead. If you like to swap speakers, it's nice to have the option.

In use

To test the Fane A60, we compared it to two well-played Celestion alnicos with which many of you will be familiar – a Blue and a Gold. The amps used were a tweed Deluxe, our Rift PR18 and a Victory Sheriff 22, while the guitars were a Strat and a Les Paul.

The differences between the A60 and the Celestion Gold are very apparent. The Gold has a thicker, raunchier midrange bark and it sounds more aggressive – it's long been a fine choice for rock tone with more dynamics and extended treble than you might get from a typical ceramic 12-inch.

The A60 is noticeably clearer and brighter. The Gold is bright, too, but with overdrive and a cranked-up amp the low mids can cloud definition in the upper frequencies when playing full chords. The A60 never loses its airy clarity and you can hear more of the subtleties of your pickups and playing.

The A60 scores highest on dynamic response; when you play lightly, you're rewarded with extreme touch sensitivity and a treble response that's lush, nuanced and almost delicate in a 50s Jensen sort of way. Dig in harder and the mids fill out Brit-style to enhance the amp's overdrive characteristic.

Shimmering treble? Check. Extreme touch sensitivity? Check. A tendency towards chime and jangle? Check

So how does it compare with everybody's alnico benchmark, the 15W Celestion Blue? The Fane actually sounds far closer to the Blue than it does the Gold. Shimmering ethereal treble? Check. Extreme touch sensitivity? Check. A tendency towards chime and jangle? Check.

The real difference is thickness of the lower mids, and in that regard the Blue and Gold share a family resemblance. However, much depends on how much power the A60 is getting and when driven harder, the low mids fill out and the overall response takes on a gently compressed quality that is extremely player friendly.

Ultimately, if power handling wasn't an issue we'd be hard pressed to choose between the Blue and the A60. The Blue has an undeniable magic and while the A60 doesn't quite match the Blue's harmonic density, it does sound clearer, better defined in the low end and just a tad smoother. Curiously, even though the stated sensitivity figures are identical, the Fane seems a bit louder.

In recent years, some speaker manufacturers have been on a mission to create a high power handling alnico 12-inch with the tone and feel of a classic low-power driver. By not shooting for the moon in power handling terms, Fane has got it spectacularly right with the A60.

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Exceptional sound quality
+ Ultra-refined treble and superb clarity
+ Extremely touch dynamic
- Nothing whatsoever

If you need higher power handling but crave classic alnico tone and touch dynamics, the A60 delivers on every front

10/10

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE

Higher-power 12-inch alnico options include the **Celestion Gold £198** and **Celestion Cream £210**, the **WGS Black Hawk £199** and **Eminence Canis Major £106**.

KEY FEATURES

Fane Acoustics Ascension A60

- **PRICE** £214
- **DESCRIPTION** 12-inch alnico magnet loudspeaker, 8/16 ohms, made in UK
- **POWER RATING** 60W
- **SENSITIVITY** 100dB
- **WEIGHT** 4.1kg/9.04lbs
- **CONTACT** Fane Acoustics 01924 224 618 **www.fane-acoustics.com**

TONY BACON

Tony Bacon is an author and journalist who writes about musical instruments, musicians, and music. More info at tonybacon.co.uk. His books include *The Ultimate Guitar Book*, *The Gibson 335 Guitar Book*, and *The Ibanez Electric Guitar Book*, and his latest is *The Bass Book* (Backbeat), which tells the story of the electric bass guitar.

FLYING HIGH AT 50

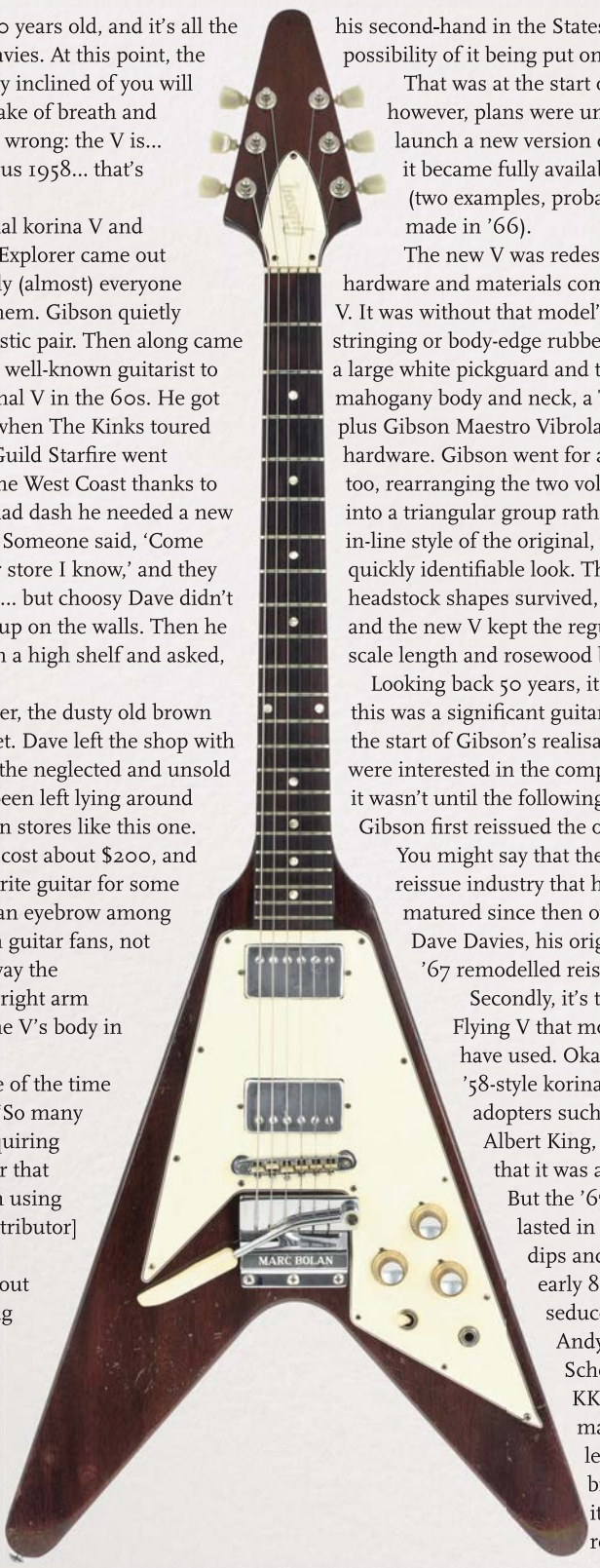
While it was first conceived in 1958, the incarnation of the Flying V we've come to love is 50 this year. **TONY BACON** celebrates its birthday

The Flying V is 50 years old, and it's all the fault of Dave Davies. At this point, the more historically inclined of you will take a sharp intake of breath and say, 'Ah ha, he's wrong: the V is... er, hold on, 2017 minus 1958... that's 59 years old, surely?'.

Correct. The original korina V and its lovely partner the Explorer came out in 1958. And famously (almost) everyone completely ignored them. Gibson quietly dropped the Modernistic pair. Then along came Dave Davies, the first well-known guitarist to be seen with an original V in the 60s. He got hold of his rare bird when The Kinks toured America in '65. His Guild Starfire went missing en route to the West Coast thanks to an airline, and in a mad dash he needed a new guitar for a TV show. Someone said, 'Come on, let's go to a guitar store I know,' and they zoomed off for a look... but choosy Dave didn't like anything he saw up on the walls. Then he spotted an old case on a high shelf and asked, 'What's that?'.

A bit of heaving later, the dusty old brown case revealed its secret. Dave left the shop with a pretty prize, one of the neglected and unsold original Vs that had been left lying around for a good few years in stores like this one. Later, he estimated it cost about $200, and it remained his favourite guitar for some time. It raised many an eyebrow among American and British guitar fans, not least because of the way the Kink would hook his right arm through the legs of the V's body in order to play it.

A British magazine of the time picked up the scent: "So many people have been enquiring about the weird guitar that Dave Davies has been using that [Gibson's UK distributor] Selmer has contacted Gibson to find out about it. It's called the Flying Arrow and was made for a specialty act in America. Gibson felt that it was too way-out to be a success, and it was only by luck that Dave happened to get his second-hand in the States. As yet, there is no possibility of it being put on the market."



That was at the start of 1966. Soon, however, plans were under way at Gibson to launch a new version of the Flying V, and it became fully available by early '67 (two examples, probably samples, were made in '66).

The new V was redesigned with different hardware and materials compared to the original V. It was without that model's through-body stringing or body-edge rubber strip, but it gained a large white pickguard and truss-rod cover, a mahogany body and neck, a Tune-o-matic bridge plus Gibson Maestro Vibrola, and chrome-plated hardware. Gibson went for a new control layout, too, rearranging the two volumes and single tone into a triangular group rather than the three-in-line style of the original, giving the new Vs a quickly identifiable look. The overall body and headstock shapes survived, with minor tweaks, and the new V kept the regular humbuckers, scale length and rosewood board.

Looking back 50 years, it's clear now that this was a significant guitar. First, it marked the start of Gibson's realisation that players were interested in the company's older designs: it wasn't until the following year, 1968, that Gibson first reissued the old-style Les Paul. You might say that the whole Gibson reissue industry that has grown up and matured since then owes its existence to Dave Davies, his original V, and the '67 remodelled reissue.

Secondly, it's this revised type of Flying V that most famous players have used. Okay, the shortlived '58-style korina V attracted early adopters such as Lonnie Mack and Albert King, and we know now that it was a great instrument. But the '67-style mahogany V lasted in the line, with a few dips and variations, into the early 80s, and along the way seduced Jimi Hendrix, Andy Powell, Michael Schenker, Mick Ralphs, KK Downing – and many more since. So, let's celebrate the 50th birthday of the guitar it's tempting to call the real Flying V.

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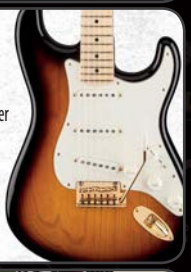

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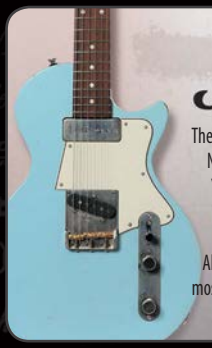

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Vintage TIME MACHINES

1959 GRETSCH 6130 ROUND-UP

With a pair of Filter'Trons onboard but no G brand, this Gretsch Round-Up is a rare bird indeed...

Of all the major American guitar brands of the 1950s and 60s, none were as willing as Gretsch to incorporate out-there design elements. From the artificial f-holes seen on guitars such as the Tennessean to the lavish gold hardware and glitzy binding of the iconic White Falcon, the Brooklyn firm built instruments with distinct visual flair and was never afraid to embrace trends of the day.

In the case of this month's Reverb.com featured guitar – a 1959 Gretsch 6130 Round-Up – this manifests in a unique country and western motif that was designed to match popular country music and TV tropes of the decade. These guitars include honky-tonk belt buckle tailpieces and leather bands on the outer edge of the body, tooled with cacti and longhorn heads. It's about as delightfully Nashville as electric guitars get.

This particular Round-Up is listed for sale on Reverb.com by Regent Sounds of Denmark Street, and is a rare Gretsch indeed. Offered originally in 1954, the earliest Round-Up models featured a prominent G brand for Gretsch on knotty pine tops, which rested on chambered mahogany bodies, as well as block (later, hump-topped) fretboard inlays.

While still relatively rare, the earlier editions of this model, from '54 through '56, are more common than those from later in the decade. By the time our Round-Up rolled off the line in 1959, the model had become a special-order option from Gretsch, not appearing in its main catalogue.

By this point, Gretsch chambered-body electrics such as the Duo Jet had seen some updates, which are reflected here. For one, the inlays switched to the thumbnail inlays seen on most Gretsches in the late 50s and 60s. More notable still, this 1959 model features two humbucking Filter'Tron pickups, which replaced the earlier DeArmond Dynasonic pickups in 1958.

This is perhaps a once-in-a-lifetime experience for a Gretsch collector

While finding any 50s Round-Up with all of its original flair intact is uncommon, finding one without a G brand on the body and with a set of Filter'Trons is perhaps a once-in-a-lifetime occurrence for a Gretsch collector. It's a unique and fascinating piece, and one that reveals much about how Gretsch built and marketed its instruments in this period.

VITAL STATISTICS

1959 Gretsch 6130 Round-Up

- **PRICE** £10,000
- **YEAR** 1959
- **TYPE** Solidbody electric guitar
- **BUILD** Chambered mahogany
- **REVERB SELLER** Regent Sounds Reverb.com/Regent
- **SEE MORE** Reverb.com/uk

Vintage

SOUND INVESTMENTS

Guitar EXP is a twin-hardback boxset documenting one of the most remarkable guitar collections on earth. *G&B* meets its author and takes a close look at a few choice cuts

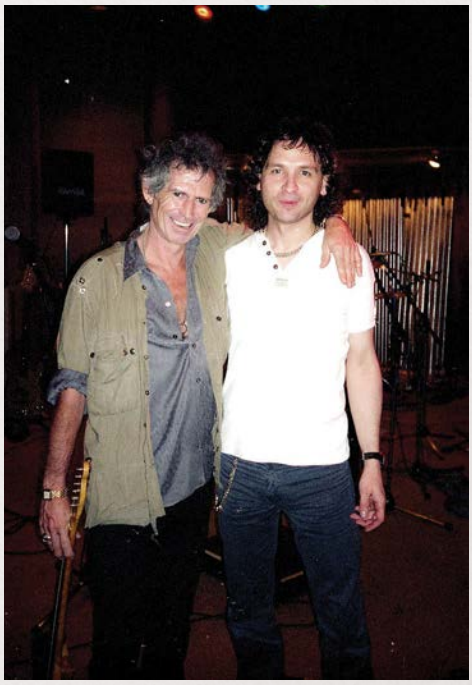
Dating from the birth of the solidbody electric through to the modern day, Armand Serra's guitar collection is nothing short of jaw-dropping. Containing instruments and amplifiers formerly owned by Hendrix, Clapton, Townshend, Keith Richards and many more, it's a guitar odyssey that takes in Blackguard Fenders, Korina Gibsons, 1950s Les Pauls, custom-colour Strats, 1960s Marshalls... the eye-watering list goes on.

Happily, Serra has now chosen to share his lifelong labour of love with the world via the sumptuous pages of a weighty twin-hardback boxset entitled *Guitar EXP*. But it hasn't always been this way. As a teenager from the south of France, he had "no interest in music" until a friend played him Grand Funk Railroad's *Live Album*.

"I was totally blown away by the music," Serra remembers fondly. "It was nothing like any music I had ever heard on French radio or TV. I soon bought more LPs by artists such as Ten Years After, Black Sabbath, Deep Purple, Jimi Hendrix, The James Gang, Free, Mountain, Cactus, Led Zeppelin, the MC5... it was all hard-rock music driven by great guitar players."

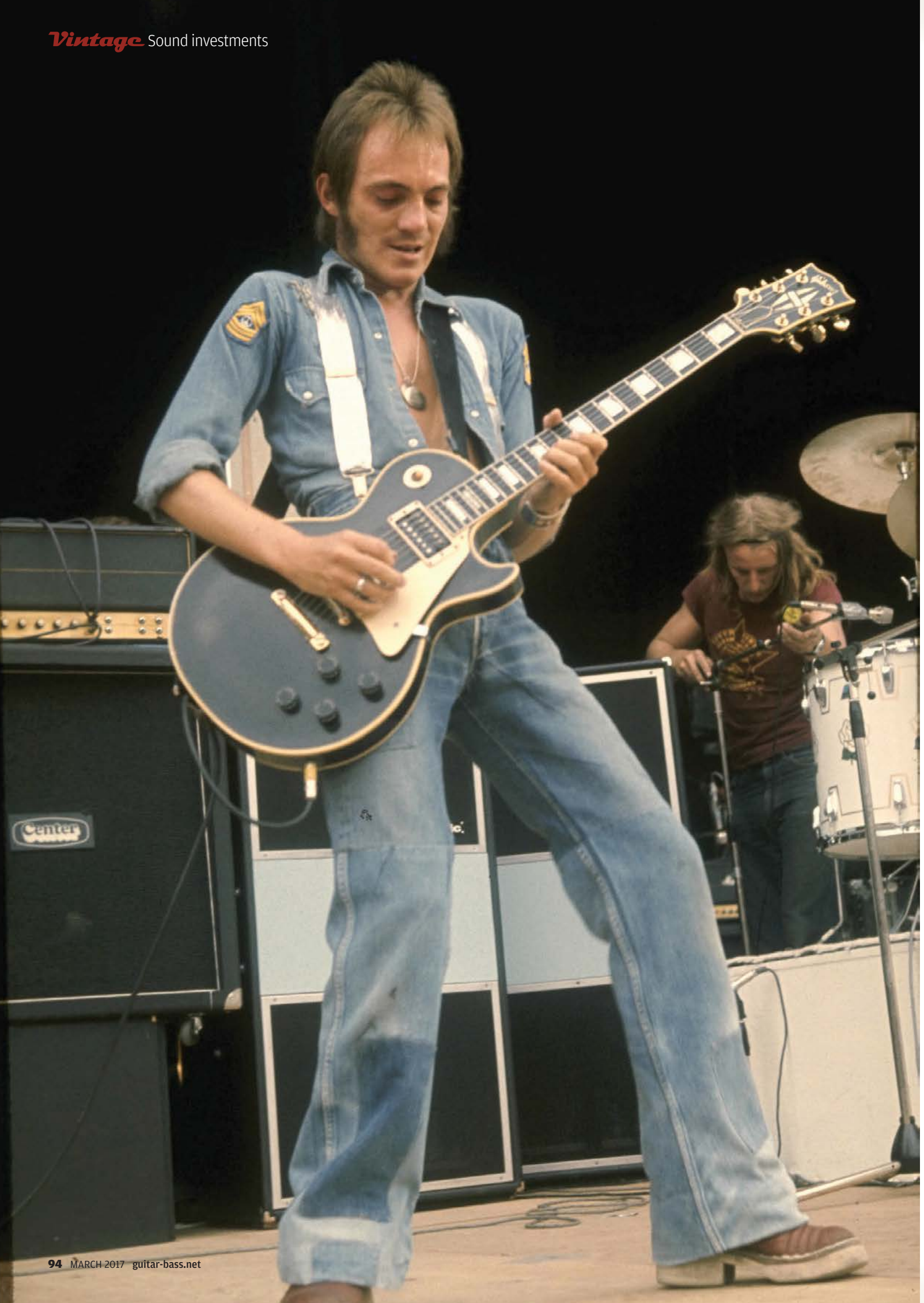
The new music fan soon became a guitarist himself, and it wasn't long before the familiar siren song of gear lust got its hooks into him: "After a series of 'cheap' guitars, I bought my first real guitar, a 1974 Olympic White Fender Stratocaster. I worked for six months in a factory to buy it. I eventually got my first pro rig; two Marshall 4x12 orange tolex cabs and a Hiwatt 100 head."

"Every time I worked in a studio, I nosed around to see if any gear was for sale. It always led to great finds"



1979 saw Serra leave his homeland for London in pursuit of a musical career: "Thanks to adverts on the back pages of the *Melody Maker*, I picked up a lot of great guitars and amps at bargain prices. Every time I worked in a recording studio, rehearsal room or gig I always nosed around to see if any gear was available for sale. It always led to great finds.

"In the 1980s, I played in a Van Halen-style band called Panama, and met a lot of big names in rock music, such as Keith Richards, Ozzy and Lemmy, to name but a few. I also travelled to the USA for guitar shows, and this is where I first >


Center

met Billy Gibbons and Rick Nielsen, who eventually became my good friends."

During that period, Serra auditioned for Scorpions, Motörhead and Iron Maiden, and jammed with Mitch Mitchell and Neil Peart. After a spell in the USA with The Epidemics, Serra recorded two albums of instrumental guitar music under his own name. He's also been a jewellery designer since the 80s, opening a boutique called Crazy Pig Designs in Covent Garden.

Serra may have stepped away from the live music scene, but vintage guitars remain his overriding passion. Working backwards from his 1974 Stratocaster because he "wanted earlier models like the ones played by Blackmore, Hendrix and Jeff Beck", he soon did the same with Les Pauls. "At first, I didn't like Les Pauls... until the day I picked up one and loved it," Serra remembers. "It played totally amazing. The store guy said, 'Of course you like it, it's a '59!' From then on, anything from 1952 to 1960, I chased them all. Classic albums from bands like Led Zeppelin, Free, Hendrix, Beck, Cream, ZZ Top, etc... all of them have 'that' sound, and that is the sound of vintage guitars. I guess I was lucky and started buying them many years ago."

"This guitar is Keith Richards' second three-pickup Les Paul Custom, the one used during Exile"

Steve Marriott/Keith Richards 1957 Les Paul Custom

"This is the famous Marriott LP Custom that he used extensively with Humble Pie. Marriott found >

Opposite page **Steve Marriott playing the 1957 Les Paul Custom in 1974 that now belongs to Serra**
Above **The third and final Firebird owned by Lynyrd Skynyrd's Allen Collins**

Above and opposite page **The Fender Strat that was Ritchie Blackmore's main guitar from 1972-77**

the middle pickup to be a nuisance, so he removed it and added a tortoiseshell plate to cover the cavity. He also replaced the mounting rings and pickguard with cream ones. As far as I know, Marriott was the first guitar player to adopt that look on a black Les Paul. Many followed, most notably Thin Lizzy's Brian Robertson.

"After suffering a neck break, the Les Paul was re-necked at Gibson. Most importantly, Marriott, who was friends with Keith Richards, confirmed that prior to him owning it the Custom had belonged to Keith. Marriott was certainly not the kind of person who needed to impress by telling stories. This guitar is Keith Richards' second three-pickup Les Paul Custom, the one used during *Exile On Main St.*

"This Fender Strat has made history in the hands of Ritchie Blackmore. Quite a pedigree!"

"I always believed that the guitar was in the possession of Marriott's family and therefore it was simply out of reach. However, I was wrong. Marriott had sold the guitar prior to moving back to the UK. A few years ago, it was put up for auction at a renowned USA auction house. Marriott's LP appeared in the catalogue with all the black hardware back on it. No one recognised the guitar and no one knew about the Keith Richards link. The auction took place very late in the day after a two-day guitar show. By the time the Les Paul came up on the auction block the room was pretty much empty. I was not going to miss the opportunity. When I picked up the guitar, inside the PIE flightcase was all the cream hardware and the spare PAF! Amazing!"

Ritchie Blackmore 1972 Stratocaster

"In early 1972, Blackmore acquired this Fender Stratocaster and used it as his main guitar until 1977. It can be seen in live video footage from New York in 1973. He carried on using that guitar with Rainbow and it is listed as Ritchie's main guitar on *Rainbow Rising*. On 17 November 1977, Rainbow played at the Granby Halls, Leicester. Blackmore used this Stratocaster for the whole show, except for the last song, when he swapped it for another guitar destined to be smashed.

"Blackmore proceded swinging and tossing the spare guitar and eventually chucked it in the air so high that it got stuck in the lighting rig. Despite efforts to pull it down by the guitar cord, it remained stuck high above the stage."

So Blackmore got back to his number one guitar and continued with the onslaught. After hitting >

Fender
STRATOCASTER

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Guitar EXP features almost 200 guitars, all rare and collectable. With forewords from Billy Gibbons and Rick Nielsen, the two-volume Deluxe Edition boxset contains 480 pages of glorious guitar photographs and history and retails at £95. Visit www.guitar-exp.com to find out more.

the Stratocaster a few times against the stage, the headstock broke off. As fans rushed to the front row, a group of friends wrestled the guitar out of Ritchie's hand as he was ready to throw it into the crowd. They managed to secure the guitar all the way back to their car.

"One lucky guy kept the guitar (minus headstock) for over 30 years. I got to hear about it and eventually tracked down the owner, who agreed to sell it to me. I immediately had the headstock repaired, and it is now back to fully functional condition. This Fender Stratocaster has made history in the hands of Blackmore, who played it with both Deep Purple and Rainbow. Quite a pedigree!"

Allen Collins Gibson Firebird

"Lynyrd Skynyrd's Allen Collins used this Firebird on the double live album, *One More From The Road*. Collins was a tall man, and a Firebird looked just right on him. During his Lynyrd Skynyrd years, Collins owned and played three different Firebirds. The first two were damaged beyond repair. This is Collins' third and last Firebird. By 1976, Collins was playing mainly a 1958 Explorer, but also the guitar you see here. It was acquired by his roadie as an urgent replacement for his second Firebird, smashed on the previous night. Just like his very first 'bird, this is a Firebird I with an added neck pickup.

"Later, Collins swapped the mini-humbuckers for DiMarzio PAFs to match the sound of his '58 Explorer. You might be surprised, but these early Di Marzios are pretty close.

"Led Zeppelin, Free, Hendrix, Beck, Cream... all have 'that' sound. The sound of vintage guitars"

"During the UK leg of the 1977 tour, Pete Haycock from The Climax Blues Band, who had become friends with Collins, joined the band on stage for an extended *Free Bird* jam. Collins played his '58 Explorer, while Haycock borrowed this Firebird. After the show, Collins gifted the guitar to Haycock.

"The Gibson Firebird remained with Haycock until his passing away in 2013. About a year later, the guitar was auctioned in London. It was a rare chance to acquire a very important guitar, especially if – like me – you are a Skynyrd fan."

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Vintage BENCH TEST

1965 FENDER TELECASTER

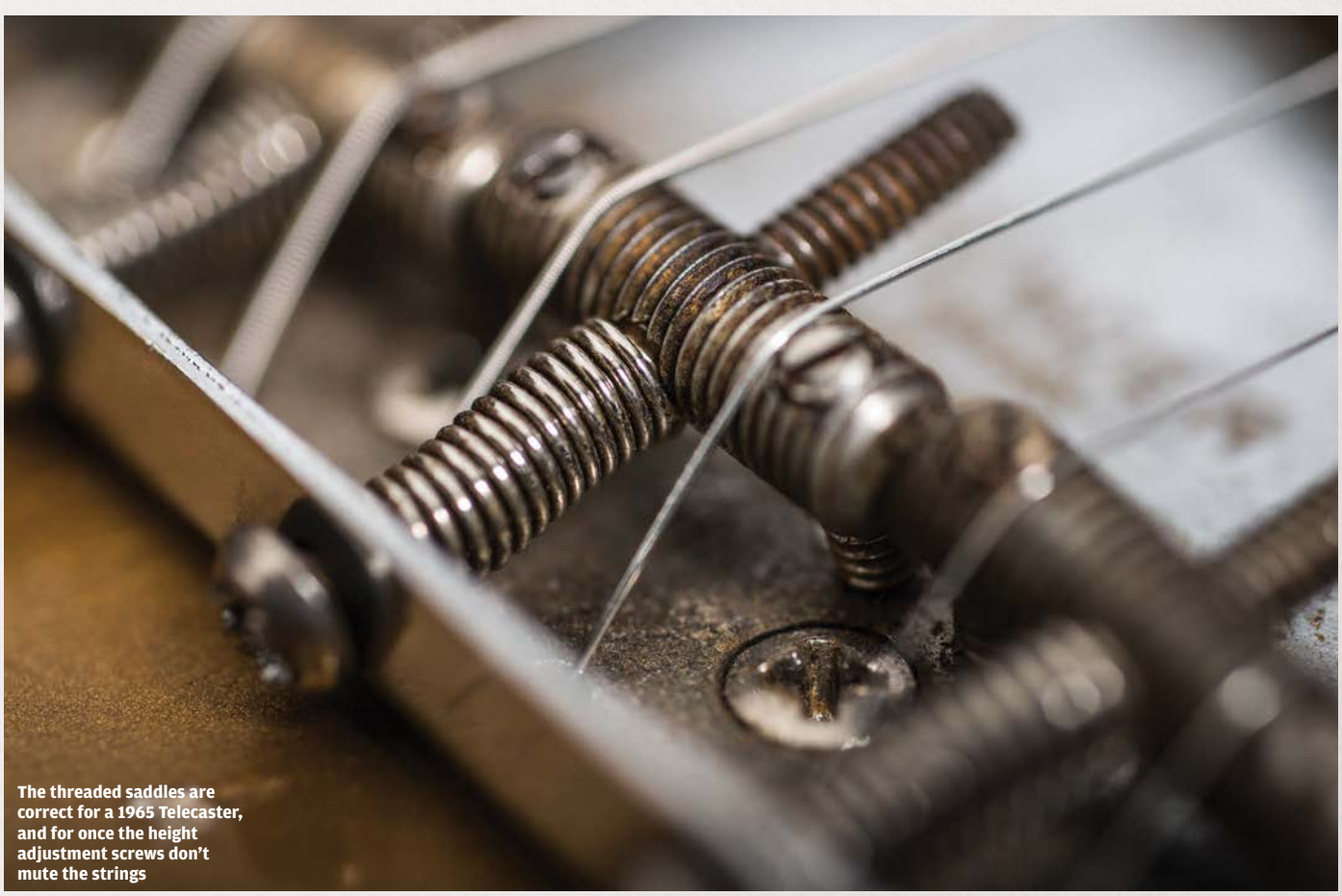
With all of its original hardware in place and a sympathetic refinish by Clive Brown, Neil Ivison's vintage Tele is a player's grade gem. **HUW PRICE** gets acquainted

Taking the rose-tinted glasses off for a moment, it would probably be fair to describe this as a common or garden '65 Telecaster. But before you conclude I'm damning it with faint praise, it's worth pointing out that in the period prior to and immediately after the CBS takeover, Fender was producing some of its finest guitars – and a good vintage Fender is about as good as any Fender can possibly be.

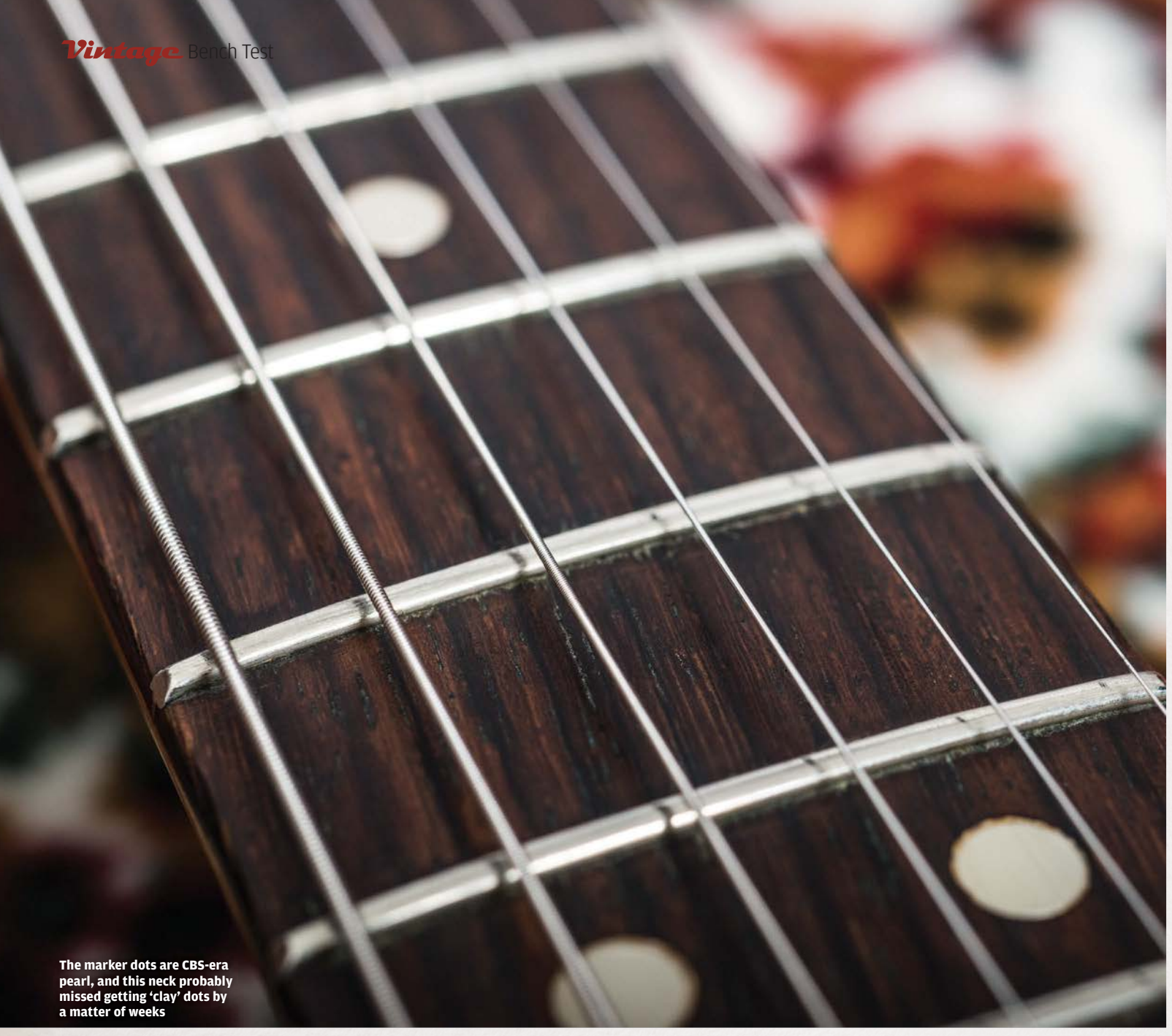
Prior to and immediately after the CBS takeover, Fender was producing some of its finest guitars

Examining this neck closely, it strikes me that from the late 50s onwards Fender was consistently ahead of the game on neck profiles as things at the factory became more standardised. Traditional guitar necks had been chunky because truss rods weren't commonplace and necks had to withstand string pull unassisted. Even after truss rods became standard, some manufacturers were slow to slim things down.

At Fender, skinnier neck depths were the norm by the late 50s, and you can sometimes make a pretty good guess at a pre-CBS Fender's date of manufacture from the neck profile alone. Although there were exceptions, most late-50s Fender necks were comparatively slim, but they retained a rounded profile. During the early 60s, the neck depth reduced noticeably under the first few frets, then thickened considerably from the fourth or fifth fret onwards. Up around the 12th >



The threaded saddles are correct for a 1965 Telecaster, and for once the height adjustment screws don't mute the strings



The marker dots are CBS-era pearl, and this neck probably missed getting 'clay' dots by a matter of weeks

KEY FEATURES

1965 Fender Telecaster

- **PRICE** N/A
- **DESCRIPTION** Solidbody electric guitar, made in USA
- **BUILD** Solid alder body, bolt-on maple neck with Brazilian rosewood veneer fingerboard, pearl dots and 21 frets
- **HARDWARE**, Kluson three-on-a-plate tuners
- **ELECTRICS** 2x original pickups, master volume, tone functional in middle and bridge positions only, three-way pickup selector switch
- **FINISH** Firemist Gold refinished body, original neck finish with pre-CBS logo
- **SCALE LENGTH** 650mm/25.5"
- **NECK WIDTH** 42mm at nut, 51.5mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 19mm at first fret, 22.5mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 36mm at nut, 53.5mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 3.25kg/7.16lbs

fret, many early-60s necks feel almost clubby, so there's a noticeable contrast between top and bottom.

During the period between the introduction of serial numbers with the L prefix and the CBS takeover, Fender necks began to even out and open out from a D profile to more of a C shape. Depth increased under the lower frets, making for a more gradual transition along the length. By around 1967, Fender necks often retained a fairly uniform depth from headstock to body as the upper end slimmed down, and it's the type of modern/classic feel that remains commonplace on many contemporary boutique instruments.

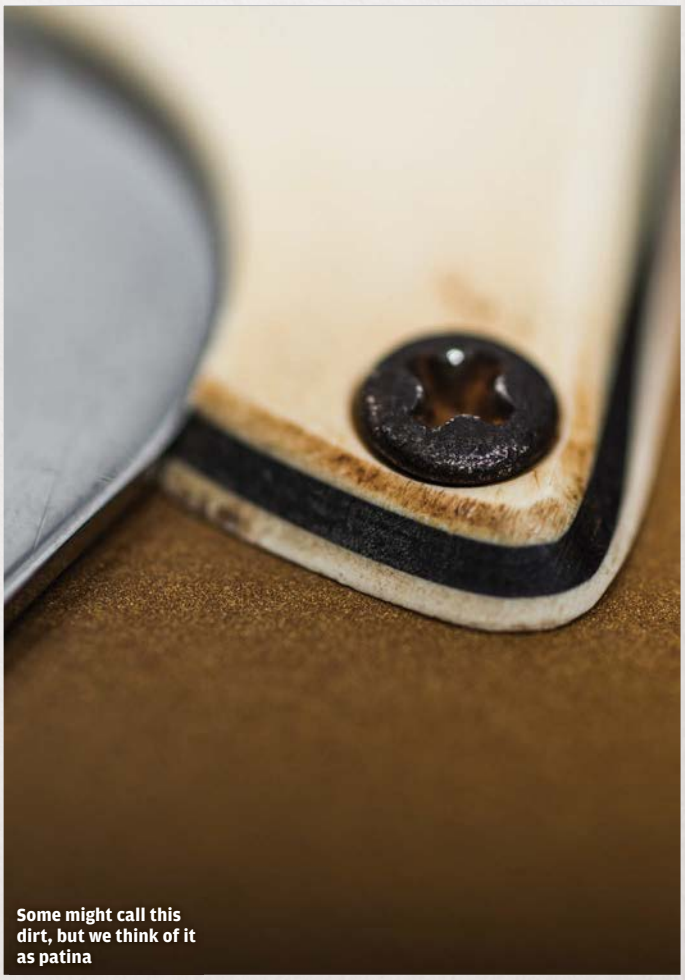
For entirely different reasons, I find the best of the Fender necks from the L-series era to be every bit as good as Gibson's necks from the mid-to-late 50s – and this Telecaster's neck is a superb example. Its curve feels as though it was carved especially for my hand, and it somehow feels slim yet also substantial. The date stamp reads 'February 65'.

The neck's curve feels as if it was carved especially for my hand and somehow feels slim yet substantial

Some depth has been lost, which is probably due to board levelling when a refret was carried out. The fret tangs all touch the maple and the radius feels slightly flatter than Fender's usual 7.25 inches, which many would consider to be an improvement. Fortunately, that refret was a particularly good one, and the fret edges conform nicely to the rolled fingerboard edges. Owner Neil Ivison has also set up this guitar beautifully using the original threaded saddles, and it intonates sweetly all over the board. >

As a 'crossover' Telecaster, it's fortunate this one got the earlier 'spaghetti' logo

This type of chrome plating distress on the knobs is typical for Teles of this era



Some might call this dirt, but we think of it as patina

Above **In contrast to early 1950s bridge pickups, later examples have staggered slugs**
Opposite page, top **If anybody has replicated the feel and look of the oxidised maple of a vintage Fender neck with complete success, we have yet to see it**
Bottom **Two lines of text on the tuner casings identify these as 'double line' Klusons**

Under black light, everything checks out except the body finish. Neil believes renowned restorer Clive Brown performed the refinish and, although it was sold to him as a Shoreline Gold, the darker hue suggests it's Firemist Gold. A surviving paint patch in the neck pocket confirms it was this Tele's original colour. A previous owner routed the body for a humbucking pickup, but the hole was filled during restoration. You might describe the look as 'light relic', but I'm going to go with 'scarily convincing'.

Under the control plate is the 0.05 ceramic tone capacitor I'd expect to see on a '65 Telecaster, and the Stackpole potentiometers date to the 40th week of 1964. The switch looks right for the mid-60s, too, with a 'half moon'-shaped Bakelite board and a white plastic centre wheel.

In use

The wiring is non-standard because the tone control works only in the bridge and middle positions. When the neck pickup is selected, the tone circuit is disengaged, and the absence of treble bleed goes hand in hand with natural microphony to provide a lot more air and clarity than we'd usually expect. In fact, the neck position sounds as bright as the middle setting.

Like a typical mid-60s Tele bridge pickup, this one sounds cutting, twangy and snarly

Like a typical mid-60s Tele bridge pickup, this one sounds cutting, twangy and snarly, so having it routed through the tone circuit balances things out. You don't have to deal with the too dark/too bright contrast that blights some Telecasters.

Compared to an early-50s spec Tele, this guitar doesn't have the woody jazziness at the neck or the pronounced quack at the bridge. Instead, >

Above **The string wrap around the bridge pickup coil has darkened and become impregnated with dust**
Opposite page, top **In the early days, Fender stamped the guitar's serial number on the bridge plate, but by 1965 the plates were stamped with patent numbers instead**
Bottom **Lovely longitudinal lacquer checking, and not too much of it is a hallmark of a pukka relic refinish**

you get a more metallic jangle, a less forward midrange and extra low-end punch. It's certainly closer to Steve Cropper's tone than Danny Gatton's, and in rhythm and lead modes this Tele can cut through any mix with its extended but shrill-free treble.

Through a blackface-style amp, the lively transients might have you reaching for a compressor pedal, but with squashier-sounding tweed and Vox-style circuits the slight spikiness becomes more of an asset. Essentially, it's the classic 60s Tele tone you've heard on thousands of records, and all you have to do is tune it up, plug it in and play.

It's the classic 60s Tele tone you've heard on thousands of records. All you have to do is plug in and play

This Tele has had some routing filled in and its body has been refinished, but so what? All the original hardware is still present and correct and, to put it bluntly, a finish like this doesn't make any difference to the tone or playability. Thanks to the refinisher's considerable expertise, you certainly wouldn't look at it and think, 'Shame about the refin'. He's restored it to its original colour and, unless it's being examined under black light, the result is outstanding and sympathetic.

A refinish – even of this quality – makes a vintage Fender a more affordable proposition for we mere mortals. Well, not guitar hacks obviously, but certainly guitar players with 'proper' jobs and understanding partners. After all, gigging a player's grade classic is a far less daunting experience than gigging an irreplaceable museum piece, and if you dent the thing you can call it honest play wear. So our thanks go once again to Neil for the loan of his absolutely stellar Telecaster.

FENDER

TOM

Vintage PRIVATE COLLECTION

GUARDIAN ANGEL

Lem Mellor opened Angel Valve Recordings to help Liverpool's budding musicians realise their creative visions. Lem takes **LARS MULLEN** on a tour of his guitars

Photography **Lars Mullen**

"I also teach," says Lem Mellor, the founder of Merseyside's Angel Valve Recordings, a community studio he set up to give musicians in Birkenhead the opportunity to record their music. "So it's two-fold really. I have a great collection of guitars and I can reach out and grab the one I can hear in my head that will bring out the best in the artist's song and suit their voice, whilst also offering students I'm teaching the opportunity to get hands-on with some classic models. It's also a good excuse to have so many," he laughs.

Mellor, who teaches guitar, banjo and ukulele to young people who are blind, disabled or have learning difficulties, previously worked as an outreach worker on Merseyside, devising musical projects for disadvantaged young people in the area, before setting up the studio. "I was also inspired to open the studio by witnessing the healing effects that music can have on people when I worked for many years with Liverpool's Wirral Youth Service as an outreach worker," he says. "I designed and delivered music projects to disadvantaged youths in the area. This is a passion for me that I'm still trying to keep going, I don't think anyone should be in the position where they cannot access music lessons or recording sessions due to their disability or circumstance.

"My students and recording artists are of all ages and at various levels of instrument expertise. A while ago, a friend recommended a lady blues singer to drop in and see what morphed out of a coffee and a chat. She used to sing in a gospel choir that regularly appeared on the kids program *Tiswas* in the late 70s and 80s, but is now the manager of a homeless service and hadn't sung solo for a long time. As soon as she opened her mouth, I hit record. It was amazing, real Billie Holiday quality.

"Luckily, I had a mid-60s Gibson ES-345 on my knee. I looked at all the other guitars around and thought, 'No, this is the one, just don't play any bum notes'. I have a big circle of friends who collect, build and repair guitars, so there's often a trade happening between us. A friend asked if I wanted to do a trade for a cool guitar that had been owned by some popular players. I said I'd be interested if the guitar was a decent player and sounded okay, and >

Opposite page **Mellor with an acoustic built by Tom Mates**
Above left **Charles Lindert baritone**
Above right **K Yairi doubleneck acoustic (top), Lowden G27FN single-cutaway electro-acoustic (left), Lowden G712 12-string with LR Baggs pickup**

Above left **Double-sided Brian Eastwood guitar**
Top right (l-r) **1978 Gibson Les Paul Custom, Antoria Custom Agent 2604, Burny RLC**
Above right **Antoria Custom Agent 2604 headstock**

not on the basis of who owned it before. It turned out to be a really nice hand-built acoustic built by Tom Mates and previously owned by the likes of Dave Pegg when he was in Jethro Tull.

"Tom has built for the likes of Gordon Giltrap, Ralph McTell and Albert Lee, as well as being a guitar tech to a host of high-profile players including Eric Clapton. I swapped a truck full of guitars and amps as part of the deal.

"I played this guitar through the night until 4am the next day and wrote a single called *Doubt*, which I recorded on my Lindert baritone originally built in Chelan Falls, Washington by Charles Lindert in the 90s. Charles had a soft spot for old radios and locomotives, which is reflected in the different designs on the hollowbodies. This one has the radio grille effect with tweed inserts. It also has what the company called an 'Escape Velocity neck', which basically meant that the C profile at the lower-fret end shifts into a V at the top. The patented 'thumbs up' headstock is very distinctive – you either love it or hate it.

"This baritone brought out the darker side of my songwriting and was the main guitar on *Doubt*, recorded with Pristine Decay. I played through a tremolo pedal, which gave it that James Bond-esque spaghetti western cinematic soundscape. You can see it on YouTube."

Angel Valve provides rehearsal and recording space, as well as Mellor's musical expertise and production skills. Selecting appropriate guitars for the various projects he works with is therefore crucial for Lem, so we asked him how he decides.

"When I get a new guitar, I have this ritual where I hook it up to a loud clean amp so I can hear the potential of the sound characteristics of the wood and the pickups. I keep to this format no matter what the guitar was originally designed for. The Burny RLC for example, with all the hardware and built-in sustainer circuit, is built to rock out, but I discovered it also sounds excellent played clean. I actually used the sustainer for a subtle effect on a lighter track.

"The Super 70 pickups on my Antoria Custom Agent 2604 are my favourite humbuckers, very powerful and warm sounding. This is another of the Japanese gems from the 70s with high-quality appointments, including seven-ply binding, body

and fingerboard inlays. The scroll headstock is vulnerable to damage, a lot from that era have been snapped off. This is also a great visual guitar used by Sly And The Family Stone.

"The Parker Fly Mojo can have an edge to the sonics, but in general the mahogany construction offers really mellow sounds. One of my older students, who has bad arthritis, was told by his doctor to stop playing. He was distraught, of course. He wouldn't give up, and I suggested we use the Mojo because of its flyweight construction and playability. I coached him back gently using this guitar and he's now playing some really complex pieces and getting feeling back in his hands."

Mellor is a big fan of British guitar makers, many of whom he's met at guitar shows: "I certainly have an infatuation for British luthiers who I've got to know personally at various guitar shows, including the late Jim Cairnes. In my opinion, he was one of our finest guitar makers. I have three of his models, which are the jewels of my collection. They include his T-type Globemaster Special, an ash-bodied Tonemaster Custom with a smooth-as-butter tremolo, and a Midnight Special built in the 70s.

"Jim was designing for Burns, hence the familiarity here. A lot of friends agree with me when I say the Midnight Special has the most comfortable neck I've ever played. He was also a genius with electronics. Chris Rea loved the sound of his pickups so much that he used them on his *Road To Hell* tour, where Jim was his guitar tech.

"Doug Wilkes is another great UK guitar builder. I came across my mid-80s Wilkes T-type, once again, at a guitar show. It was on a stand run by Frailers Guitar & Banjo Shop, one of my favourites. I swapped an expensive resonator for this one and used it the same evening at one of my music nights. Four people commented, not on my playing but about the tone of the guitar, which has Lindy Fralin pickups. The scratchplate is hand-woven leather."

G&B always likes to hear an interesting story that accompanies a guitar, and this next one takes some beating. "Legend has it," says Mellor, "that my little Gibson L-1 dating from 1929 was a victim of a saloon bar gunfight, I'd love to know more details. The more romantic side of me would like to think it was used as a shield against a gun-toting, jealous husband seeking revenge on Mr Johnson maybe? >

Above **Gibson ES-175 (left), Gibson ES-345**

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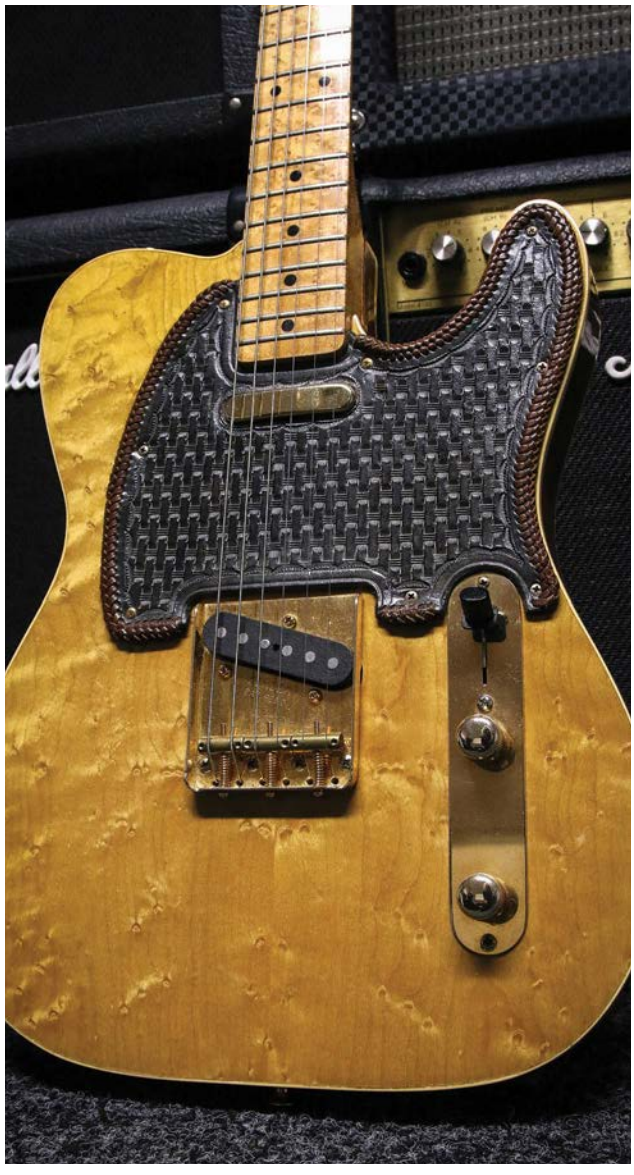

Entirely speculation of course, but it certainly was shot. You can see the entry and exit bullet holes, which have been adequately repaired.

"It probably had a brown mahogany finish, which was popular for this model back then. The refinish is certainly not the best job, but it has character and plays great after a very good refret by Stan Francis, a Liverpool luthier.

"I was wandering around Hobgoblin Music in Manchester whilst waiting for a friend to have a banjo re-skinned, and at the other side of the shop something didn't look proportionally correct for an acoustic guitar, the neck just seemed to be reaching up at a jaunty angle. When I got closer, it was an 80s K Yairi doubleneck acoustic. One neck had standard-gauge strings, the other had the octave equivalent. I sat on an amp and started writing songs immediately, it was a 'fall in love' guitar. I told the shop guy, 'This now belongs to me, whatever it costs'. The deal involved a lot of my guitars. This is an irreplaceable guitar and was just recently used on an album I collaborated on with Juldeh Camara from Robert Plant's band, The Sensational Space Shifters.

"My electro-acoustic Lowden G27FN nylon-strung guitar from '84 is a beauty and essential to have in my teaching role, as I'm often working with classical and jazz students. This is from the mid-80s, a period when George Lowden spent several years working with mastercraftsmen in Japan, who often serve a 25-year apprenticeship.

"I'd seen a very unusual cello guitar several times at guitar shows, and finally asked if I could give it a try. It barked out what I would describe as a really vintage rhythm sound, very Django-esque. It was made by J Chamberlain, from Leicester, in 1939. I've never seen another one. If I play it live, people remember me as the guy with the weird guitar, which is probably what they say about most of them. The guys at KGB Guitars are looking at fitting an unobtrusive pickup system for me, I can hear a lot of great songs waiting to come out of this one.

"Whilst these guitars play a big part in the studio and with my students, I often look at them wondering how many songs are inside waiting to come out. My wooden-bodied Texarkana D40E, dating from '65, is a fine example, I just can't put it down. A friend called me up and asked if >

Top left (l-r) **Jim Cairnes Globemaster Special, Jim Cairnes Midnight Special, Jim Cairnes Tonemaster Custom**
Above left (l-r) **Vintage Gordon Giltrap Deluxe, Gibson J-50, Guild D-25, '72 Kasuga acoustic, Yamaha FJ-665S Jumbo (top)**
Main picture **1980s Wilkes T-type**

Above (l-r) **Gibson L-1, J Chamberlain cello guitar, Texarkana D40-E**

I wanted to do a trade for a resonator. When he turned up with a bashed case with the faux alligator skin hanging off, I knew it was going to be a good day. It was made under licence by Mosrite, dating from '65. It has one of the warmest, most soulful resonator sounds I've heard. I have a few blues player friends who are regulars in the studio and can't put it down.

"I'm a little confused with my black Yamaha FJ-665S Jumbo, as it has a Japanese serial number but 'Taiwan' on the label. My researching says this mid-80s model wasn't produced in Taiwan. I've seen Paul Simon and Bruce Springsteen with one and they seem to be very expensive, although I had a real deal with this one. The guy who had it before me backpacked it literally around the world – at least I know all the wear and tear is authentic.

"Probably the craziest guitar I own is a double-sided oddity made by Brian Eastwood, another one of our great luthiers, and again bought at a guitar show. I tried to get him to sell me this guitar, but he refused as it was a prototype. He offered to make me a new one, but I wanted this one, as it has that apocalyptic *Mad Max* look about it. It took another three years of persuading until he finally gave in. It's the definition of oddball, with separate hardware and electrics for both sides. If you break a string, you just shrug your shoulders and turn it over."

Mellor's vintage Guild acoustic is the last guitar we talk about – straightforward it may be, but it has some cool stories attached to it.

"I have to include my old Guild D-25 acoustic," he says, "as it's been such a friend and one of the first guitars I considered as a serious investment. I've worked with hundreds of students with it, including a few Liverpool gangs.

"I earned respect from these street gangs and actually made some fine recordings, it went really well. So well that the police were concerned where certain gangs were disappearing several times a week. They were so impressed, they donated a substantial amount to keep the project running."

"I'm surprised there aren't more people going out and taking music to the people on the streets," Mellor adds. "In the meantime, I've just got my corner of world here in Angel Valve studios, where I'm trying to keep the respect flowing to some of the fine artists out there."

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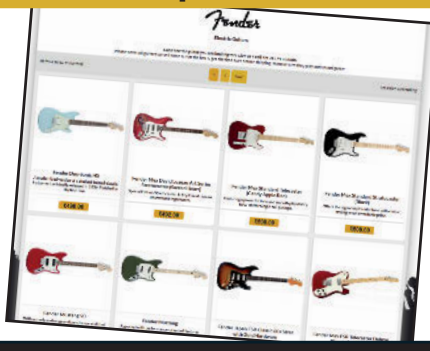

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All about... Electric Strings

Following our look at the history of acoustic strings last issue, this time **HUW PRICE** turns the spotlight on the evolution of their electric siblings – from 1930s New York to the present day

We can identify acoustic and electric strings at a glance because of the colour differences. Most acoustic strings have a brass or bronze look, whereas electric strings have a shiny silver appearance – at least when they're new. Nevertheless both types are called 'steel strings', so why can't you put acoustic strings on an electric guitar?

The answer is that you can but the sound won't be quite the same. Acoustic strings are designed solely to drive a soundboard into vibration, but electric strings generate an alternating current within a pickup's wire coil by disrupting its magnetic field. The disruptions caused by a string's vibration generate an alternating electronic current within the pickup's coil that is analogous to the amplitude and frequency of the string.

In order to do so, the string has to be made from a magnetic material. Consequently, nylon guitar strings would generate no electric sound whatsoever, and a magnetic pickup can respond only to the steel core of a wound acoustic string. Brass, zinc and bronze-type alloys are non-magnetic and therefore do not affect the magnetic field. So if you put acoustic strings on an electric, the pickups will respond only to the core of the wound strings and signal level will be weak.

Even so, magnetic soundhole pickups are now commonplace and you can get specialised strings such as the Newtone Master Class Electro-Acoustic set with phosphor bronze on the three low strings and a nickel wound G to smooth the transition between wound and plain strings. The DR Zebra set has alternate nickel and phosphor bronze windings to optimise piezo pickup tone and magnetic pickup response for each of the wound strings.

During the 1930s, New York luthier John D'Angelico and string manufacturer John D'Addario teamed up to develop an electric string

Getting back to electric strings, the necessity for magnetic materials until recently restricted the choice of metals to nickel and various types of steel. The variety of electric guitar strings is now wider than ever, but the basic construction is the same as acoustic strings, with round or hexagonal core wires.

Metallurgy

Obviously, there were no 'electric strings' before the electric guitar was invented. However, since the operating principle of guitar pickups was so clearly understood, it didn't take long for manufacturers to conclude that steel rather than bronze strings were needed for pickups to operate properly.

During the 1930s, New York luthier John D'Angelico and string manufacturer John D'Addario teamed up to develop an electric string. To combat raw steel's tendency to rust, they used 'Bethanized' steel windings with a corrosion-resistant zinc coating.

Meanwhile, in Michigan, Gibson's catalogues featured Electric Spanish Guitar Strings known as Mona-Steels. These were named after a naturally occurring alloy called monel, which contains nickel, copper and iron. Its corrosion resistance made it a suitable choice for acoustics and electrics, and if you're interested in Charlie Christian-era tone, you could try some Martin Retros on your archtop – even if it does say 'acoustic' on the packet.

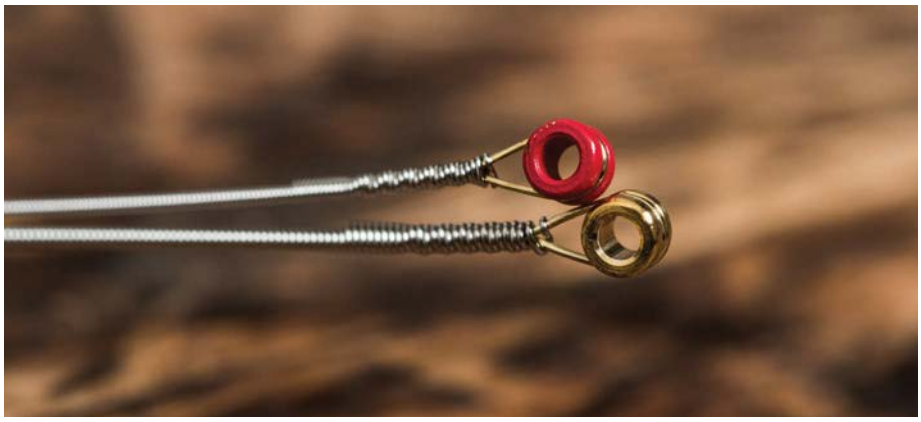
Nickel and chime

By the mid-1950s, string manufacturers such as Pyramid were making pure nickel strings, and nickel remained the metal of choice for much of the early rock 'n' roll era. This continued throughout the 1960s with US manufacturers such as Fender and Gibson introducing their own pure-nickel sets. The tone is rich, warm and balanced, and since it isn't especially bright to begin with, it remains consistent for a long time.

Fortunately for jazz, blues and roots rock players, pure nickel strings are easy to find once again, and you can get them with both round and hex cores. The hex cores are a little bit brighter and tighter, but some find the round cores easier to bend and appreciate their looser feel. With round-core strings, you must take care to tune them to concert pitch before snipping off the excess length at the tuner posts.

Steel works

US military involvement in Korea and Vietnam has been linked to an increase in the price of nickel, and by the late 1960s string manufacturers began moving to stainless and nickel-plated steel. It was the same scenario for the cobalt component of alnico >



speakers, so it could be said that the Pentagon inadvertently influenced the sonic evolution of rock guitar.

Nickel-plated steel strings sound brighter than pure nickel strings, but that airy treble is shortlived and after a few days of playing they can sound much the same as pure nickels. Play them for a few weeks and they may even sound duller than pure nickel strings of a similar age.

A friend recently observed that he used to be hooked on nickel-plated strings and would change sets once a week or so to retain the brightness. However, since discovering how microphonic pickups can open up treble response to cut through a mix, he has switched to pure nickel and often leaves sets on his guitars for several weeks despite a very busy gigging schedule.

Even so, many country and rock players find that steel strings deliver the cutting tone with the high output levels that they need. Drop tuners may prefer heavier wound strings to retain definition, and some metalheads use string sets such as Dunlop Heavy Core and GHS Heavyweights that feature thicker core wires with thinner wrap wires for the tone and tension of heavier-gauge strings without 'bass' string diameter.

Adventurous alloys

Pure nickel and nickel-plated strings aren't an option for players who are allergic to nickel. Fortunately, there are other materials to choose from – and you don't require a medical condition to try them. For maximum brightness, you should check out stainless steel strings with hex cores. Most report that they retain their brightness for some time, but be aware that stainless steel is harder than nickel and it will wear down frets faster than usual.

Like nickel, cobalt is a ferromagnetic metal, so it can be used for strings as well as speaker magnets. Users report impressive dynamics, rich harmonic content and high output, combined with longevity and an easy playing feel. Maraging steel comes from the aerospace and defence industries and it's described as "a superalloy used in high-stress applications". The Ernie Ball M-Steels promise rich tone, beefy lows and improved tuning stability.

Considering America's aforementioned military activities and a looming uncertainty over its future foreign policy, cobalt and maraging steel string enthusiasts may consider stockpiling a few sets while they still can!

If you're prepared to change pickups, valves and speakers in your quest for tone, surely it makes sense to experiment with your strings too

It's a wrap

The vast majority of electric players use roundwound strings regardless of the alloy. However, flatwound strings have always been popular with jazzers. Some may find it strange that country and rockabilly pickers who prefer mellower 50s-style tones often use flatwounds too.

Flatwounds on a Telecaster may seem as incongruous as a BC Rich through a Roland Cube, but a set of Thomastik-Infelds or D'Addario Chromes will ramp up the retro twang appeal. If they were good enough for Buddy Holly and Cliff Gallup, they're good enough. Period. If you like the idea and tone of flatwounds but find the feel and lack of treble a bit off-putting, consider groundwound and half-flat strings for a smooth feel, even response and a tone that's right between roundwound and flatwound.

It has often been said that people move house and get divorced with greater regularity than they change bank accounts. The same is probably true of guitar strings – both electric and acoustic – and if you ask most players why they use 'Brand X', the answer will probably be "because I always have". Hopefully, this article has demonstrated that strings can have a big influence on the output level, tone and feel of your guitar. If you're prepared to change pickups, valves and speakers in your quest for tone, surely it makes sense to experiment with strings, too, because it's just about the cheapest and easiest guitar mod of all.

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Chord Clinic

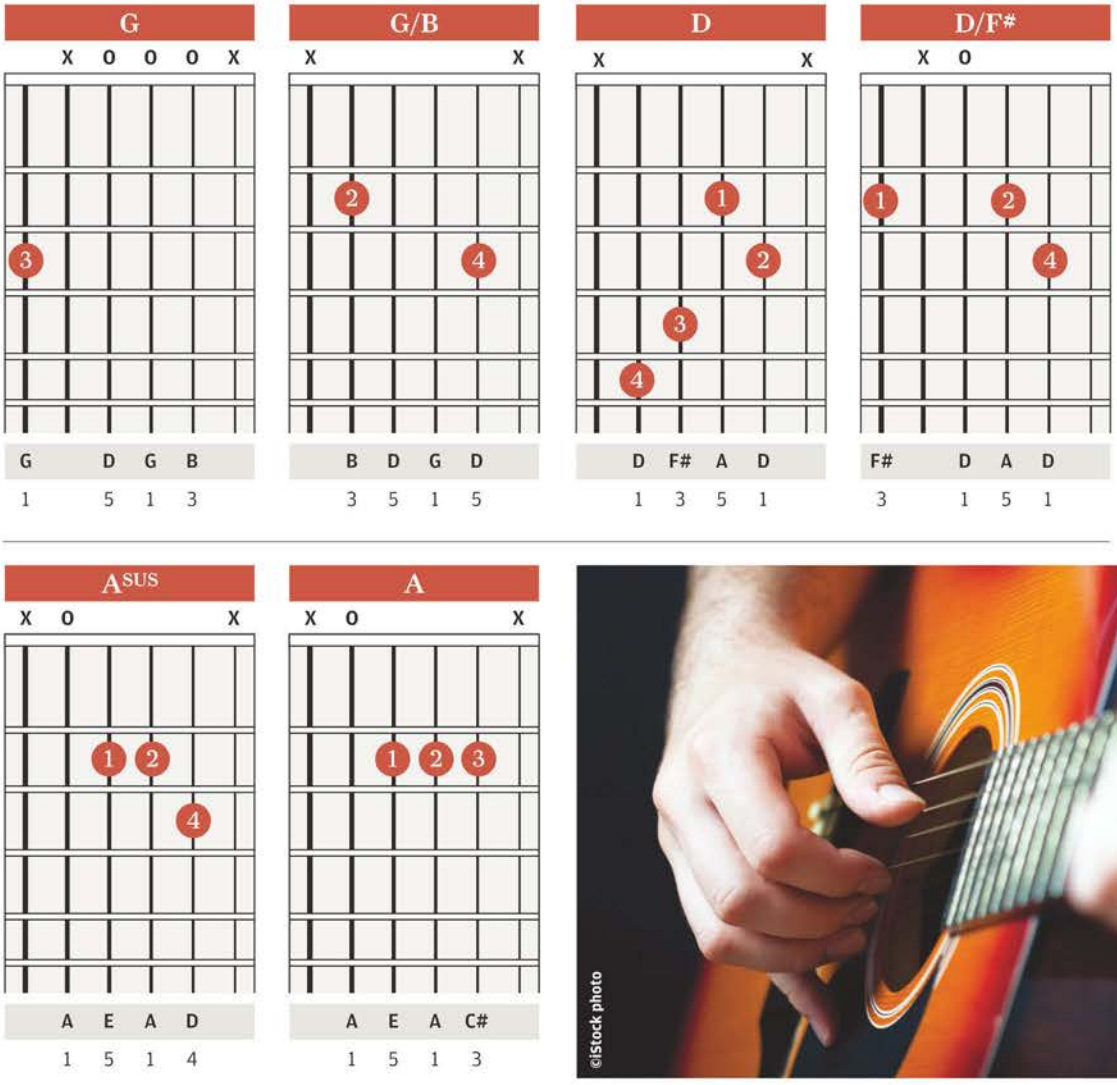
Starting with a simple eight-bar chord sequence, find out where slash chords can take you. **ROD FOGG** is all about that bass...

Last month, we took an eight-bar chord sequence made up of two bars each of G, D, G and A, and used pedal notes and suspensions to add interest and movement to what is otherwise a fairly static and predictable chord sequence. In this month's edition, we are going to keep the same chord sequence and try to achieve the same goal by exploring the possibilities offered by slash chords.

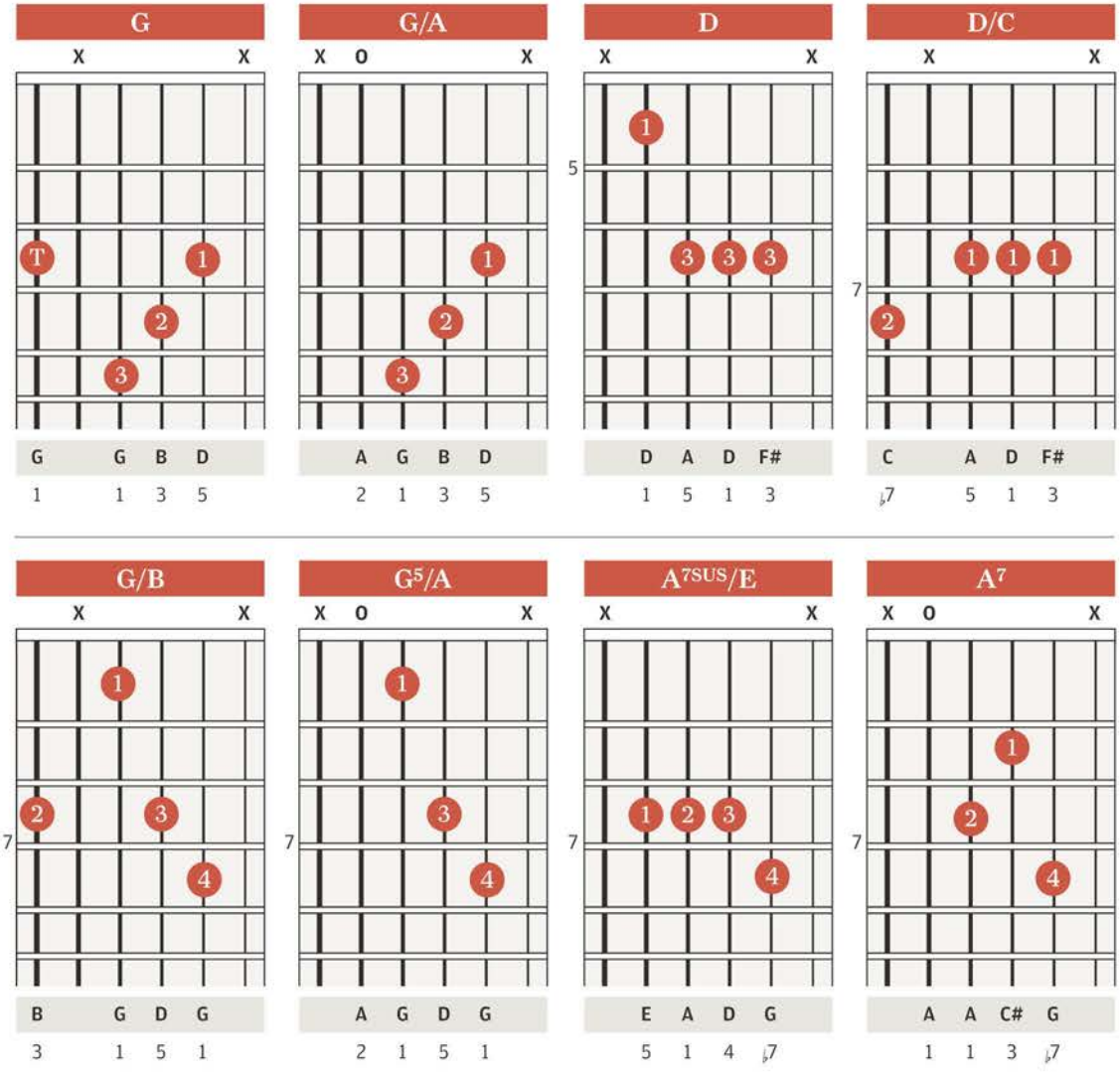
As we explained in a previous instalment of Chord Clinic, with slash chords the first letter tells you what chord to play and the second letter, after the forward slash, tells you what note to put in the bass. When we play chords normally, we assume that the root note of the chord is in the bass, but with slash chords any note can be the bass note – although most often it is another note from the chord, such as the third, fifth or possibly the seventh.

Figure 1 gets you started with what has to be the simplest G major chord on guitar, with just the third finger on the low E string. Incidentally, you should be playing all these examples fingerstyle, with your picking thumb on the bass note and the first three fingers of your picking hand taking care of the other three notes in the chord. You could also use hybrid picking, where your pick takes the place of the thumb and the weaker three fingers do the rest. If you want to just use a pick, break the chord apart, playing the bass note and the other three notes as two separate pick strokes.

In the bass (Fig 1)



In the space (Fig 2)



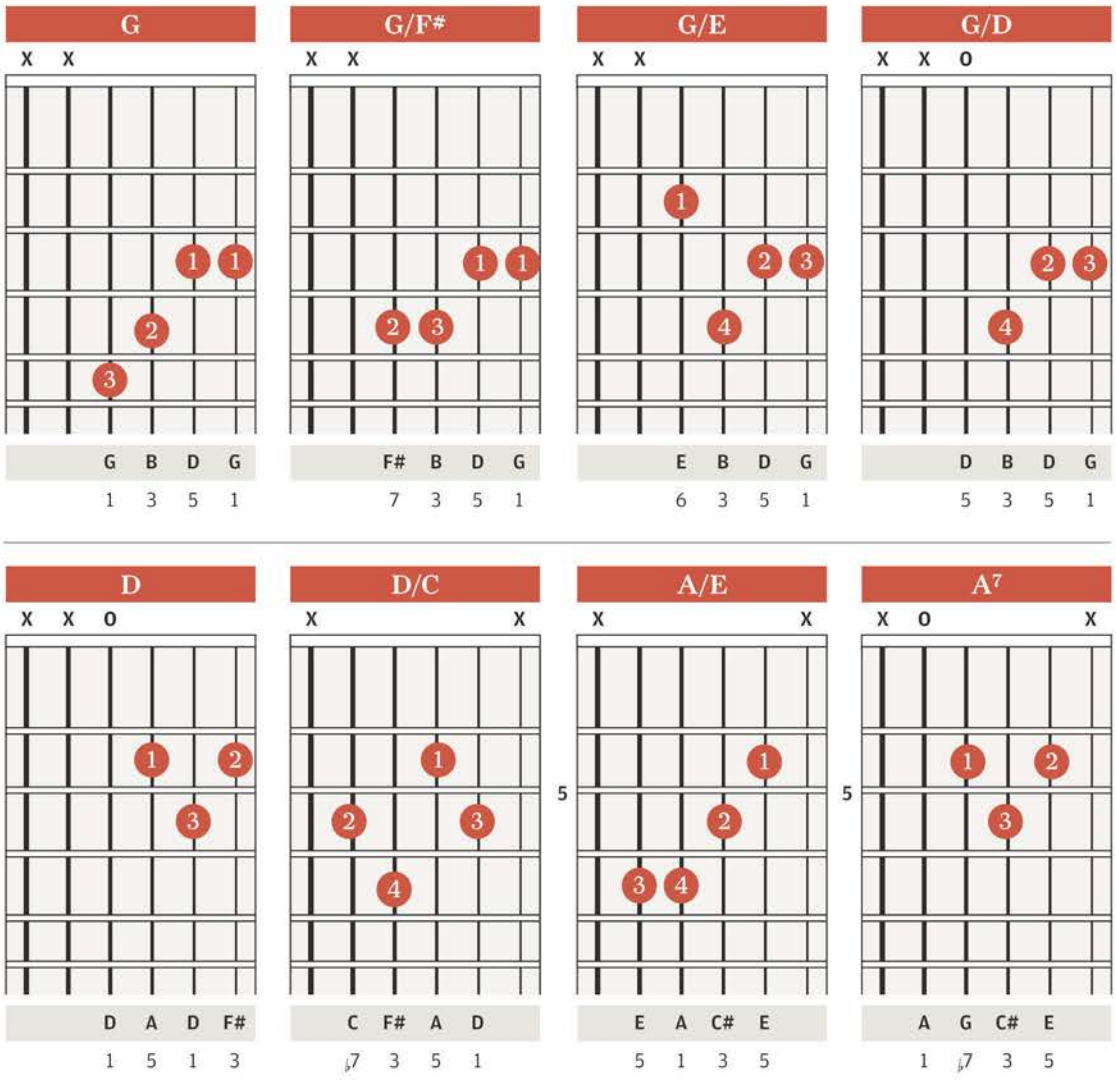
Notice that the third chord avoids the typical open-string D major, and instead goes for the slightly trickier closely voiced chord on the middle four strings. This shape is preferable in this instance because the voice leading (the note at the top of the chord) can then stay the same for three consecutive chords instead of jumping up to the high F# at the top of the open-string chord. Experiment, and see which one you prefer. After the D/F# chord, go back to G and G/B and then onto Asus and A to make an eight-bar chord sequence. On a technical note, G/B and D/F# are known as first-inversion chords, because the third of the chord is in the bass.

Figure 2 introduces some new ideas, such as the fact that the specified bass note does not have to be in the chord (G/A for example), and that you can use slash chords with sevenths and suspensions. A7sus/E has the fifth in the bass, which makes it a second inversion, and D/C is D7 with the seventh in the bass – that would make it a third inversion. In this example, all eight bars are spelt out for you, and this one works particularly well with arpeggios.

Figure 3 get things moving in the opposite direction with a descending bassline under the G major chord, two chords per bar. This time, we've decided to use the open-string D major chord that we avoided in figure 1, simply because it sounds good following on from the voicing we are using for the G/D chord. The D/C is tricky, but notice that your third finger is already in the right place for this chord, so don't take it off just to have to put it down again. A/E requires a fairly slick movement up the guitar from the G/D chord, but it shouldn't be too unfamiliar if you recognise that it is made up of the middle notes of the A barre chord found at the fifth fret.

Throughout each of these examples, we have stuck to the brief supplied by the original eight-bar chord sequence and the additions and alterations have been to the bass notes, the voice leading and occasionally the use of seventh or suspended chords. See if you can apply these techniques to chord sequences you are working on. More next month! >

Fall from bass (Fig 3)



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Fretbuzz

Your letters. This month: the joys of electronics, the wonders of old guitars and remembering to use the gear you have...

LETTER OF THE MONTH

Travelling back to 1963...

Looking back through the last few months' issues of *G&B*, I can't help but think how we are all now becoming practical electronics engineering fans as well as guitar players – and why not? In amongst the guitars and basses and tuition, we've got how valves work, very detailed pictures of circuit boards, the merits of Sprague capacitors and cathode bias; and even the excellent Huw Price and Chris Vinnicombe spending a day building a boutique amplifier with soldering skills in close-up. In regard to valve amplifiers and historic pedal designs, this is all déjà vu for me and I'm loving it! Here's why.

I'm still gigging occasionally at the age of 70, after 55 years of semi-pro electric guitar and amplifier fanaticism kicked off by the whole Merseybeat thing. In the very early 60s, the gear availability for impecunious kids was extremely limited, so there was quite a lot of self-construction of guitars, basses, speaker cabs and amps. *Practical Wireless* became a go-to read for the ads in the back for Fane 18-inch bass speakers, OC71 germanium transistors, mains transformers and (ridiculously cheap!) valves. I also formally studied radio and electronics engineering for my job, so I became immersed not only in how to play the latest Billy J Kramer & The Dakotas hit, but also the idiodsyncrasies of capacitor value for tone variation in guitars and the AC30's over-complicated (but very clever) vibe/trem circuitry.

***G&B* rolls up its sleeves for a spot of electronics fun**

The point I would make is this: there's obviously a quest for 'tone' driving the valve-guitar amplifier industry, but the actual amplifiers and their circuits are largely the same as what we were all working on in the early 60s. In fact, there is a conscious effort to go back to old construction methods: it's all about the tone, we're told. So, my enjoyment in reading a lot of the ever-increasing valve electronics content is a smiley, 'rocking chair on the porch' revisit to those early days. It is a shame, however, that we didn't have excellent magazines such as *G&B*, which even lists the valves within an amp review; the *Bell Music Catalogue* or similar of the time would just say something like "stupendous sounds", with the only person who knew how the thing actually worked being an ancient geezer with a green eyeshade in the back of some dingy radio and TV repair shop.

So well done *G&B*, it's good to see the young whippersnappers in the valve-amp industry carrying the banner, while you demystify some of the practical-electronics side of valve amps for a wider audience. Me? I'm back in 1963 amongst your pages... keep it up!

Phil Harley, via email

WRITTEN A LETTER OF THE MONTH?

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ORANGE AMPLIFICATION

The old ones are the best

Here I am, strumming away in the kitchen, thinking about the olden days of my first guitar. A new acoustic steel string in black-to-red sunburst bought for about DM20 (about two quid) in Kaufhof, Dortmund, in 1962.

It had strings that would have been more at home on one of those wire egg-slicer jobbies and an action of about 1/16 inch at the first fret and at least 1/4 inch at the 12th fret, ripped my fingers to shreds and all those other old clichés. Intonation? What's intonation? I hadn't a clue, but I loved that guitar. Since then, I have progressed through la-di-da Gibsons, Fenders and some amazing basses which were so easy to play and set up, noting that some of the cheaper offerings were superb, too. So what am I doing this morning? The la-di-da guitars are confined to their cases. I'm playing a 1960s Harmony parlour, strung with 0.013s, with an action and intonation just like my first nameless guitar (albeit I'm playing with a bottleneck). I'm having the time and fun of my life!

MJG, via email

Close to home

I thought I'd write an email to remind your readers to 'give her a second chance'. I've been playing guitar for nearly 15 years now and have enjoyed every minute. While the quest goes on for acquiring more guitars and working towards the Holy Grail, it's easy to forget what you might have and just how good it can be. Recently, I was looking for a travel guitar that I could take away with work, when I looked at my 3/4 classical guitar. This was my first guitar from many moons ago and I thought it would be perfect for the job. A quick string change and a strum rekindled our bond and it now travels with me everywhere we go. The lesson? Look at what you've got and remember why you still have it. Don't replace things unnecessarily, when you already have the perfect tool for the job. Still doesn't cure my need for new guitars, though!

Henry Boyde, via email

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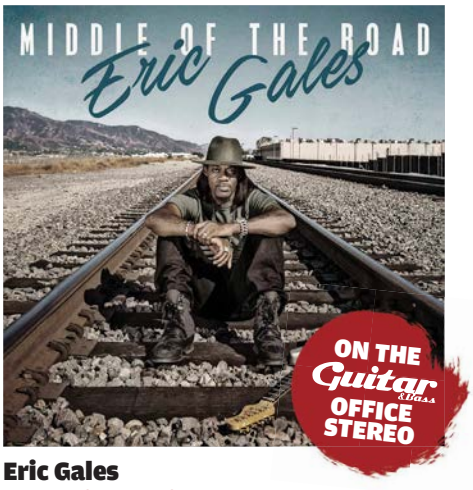
New music

We round up and rate a selection of this month's guitar-driven album releases and reissues



Eric Gales
MIDDLE OF THE ROAD

Joe Bonamassa thinks Eric Gales could be "one of the best, if not the best, guitar player in the world" – and on this evidence, we aren't about to argue. The Memphis bluesman's new record could be just the injection of danger and unpredictability that the blues-rock scene desperately needs. It's packed not just with inflammatory and imaginative solos (although there are many of those), but also with some of his best songs yet. The highlights are many, ranging from the rhythmic strut of *Help Yourself* to the jazz-tinged, loping, Prince-esque *Repetition,* all the way to the acoustic confessional of *Help Let Me Go*. Add in cameos by Gary Clark Jr and a host of others and this will hopefully be the album that brings Gales' expansive talent to a wider audience. **CM**

8/10

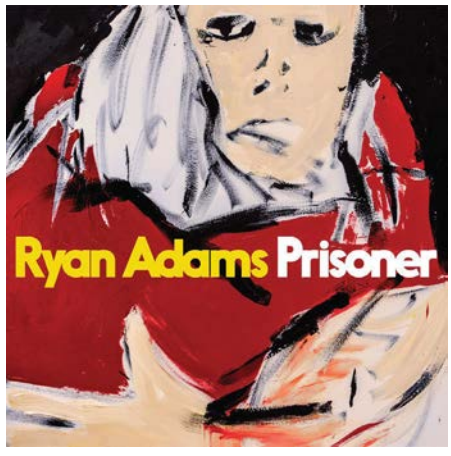
TRY IF YOU LIKE *Philip Sayce, Lenny Kravitz, Freddie King*

Wille And The Bandits
STEAL

Considering their songs are based predominantly around swaggering, bluesy lap-steel and Dobro riffs, and given the emphasis on the live aspects of their obviously road-hardened sound, this Cornish three-piece weave a lot of different influences – folk, rock, blues and 70s riffery – into the nine tracks here. Frontman Wille Edwards peddles a neat line in atmospheric, effects-laden electric lap-steel soloing and bassist Matt Brooks conjures up some original lines on his six-string electric and five-string double basses; plus there's the welcome addition of Deep Purple's Don Airey on keys for three songs. The arrangements benefit from plenty of light and shade – the band's strongest suit is their togetherness as a unit and it's been captured skilfully on this ambitious, polemical outing. **CM**

7/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Ben Harper, John Butler Trio*



Ryan Adams
PRISONER

It might be a little reductive to call *Prisoner* Adams' '80s heartbreak' record, but such an assessment is not a million miles off the mark. Punchy opener *Do You Still Love Me?* could have been culled from a *Rocky* soundtrack (the spluttering guitar solo is a cracker) and there are numerous nods to the singer-songwriter's hero Johnny Marr, including the wriggling lead lines of the title track, *Doomsday* and *Anything I Say To You Now*. A post-divorce bleakness cuts through many of the songs, most notably the fingerpicked acoustic ballad *To Be Without You*. Sobriety is perhaps the reason that the quicksilver flashes of genius that elevated Adams' early solo albums are in shorter supply, though. As unlikely as it seems, the once-mercurial Adams is now a safe pair of hands. **SH**

6/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Conor Oberst, Neal Casal*

Black Star Riders
HEAVY FIRE

The third release from the artists formerly known as Thin Lizzy is a heavier affair. The move towards a more modern sound is complete, *Letting Go Of Me* boasting an edge Metallica fans will savour. Guitars-wise, it's Les Pauls (and Marshalls) all the way. *Testify Or Say Goodbye* is the most Lizzy-esque, while *Ticket To Rise* rides a twisted Beatles riff. Nothing outstays its welcome, and some of these tracks may well make the live set on their March tour. **MH**

7/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Thin Lizzy, Foo Fighters*

Strand Of Oaks
HARD LOVE

War On Drugs producer Nicolas Vernhes is drafted in for Strand Of Oaks' fifth album, resulting in a widescreen indie record with classic-rock intent. *Radio Kids* is a shoegaze-y anthem cloaked in enthralling guitar noise, while things take a psychedelic turn on the Dandy Warhols-like *Everything. On The Hill* and the closing track will provide moments of headphones ecstasy for early Verve fans. Ambitious, affecting stuff. **GW**

8/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *The War On Drugs, The Verve*

Ty Segall
TY SEGALL

From the outset of opener *Break A Guitar,* Ty Segall's second self-titled album is a homage to the instrument. The epic two-part *Freedom* and *Warm Hands* and the wanton *Thank You Mr. K* showcase some outrageous Crazy Horse-like soloing, but this prolific, genre-curious writer shows he's no one-trick pony on the sleepy Lennon-esque acoustic pair *Talkin'* and *Orange Color Queen*. Occasional misadventures into fretboard over-indulgence are compensated by the quality and quantity of ideas. **GW**

7/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Queens Of The Stone Age, The Beatles*

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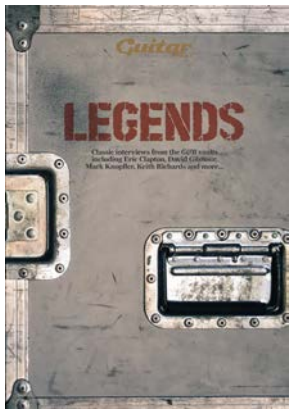
David Gilmour **28**
G&B spoke to the legendary Strat player about political songs, solos and performance – and we find out how to spot whether he's on form live in this 2009 interview



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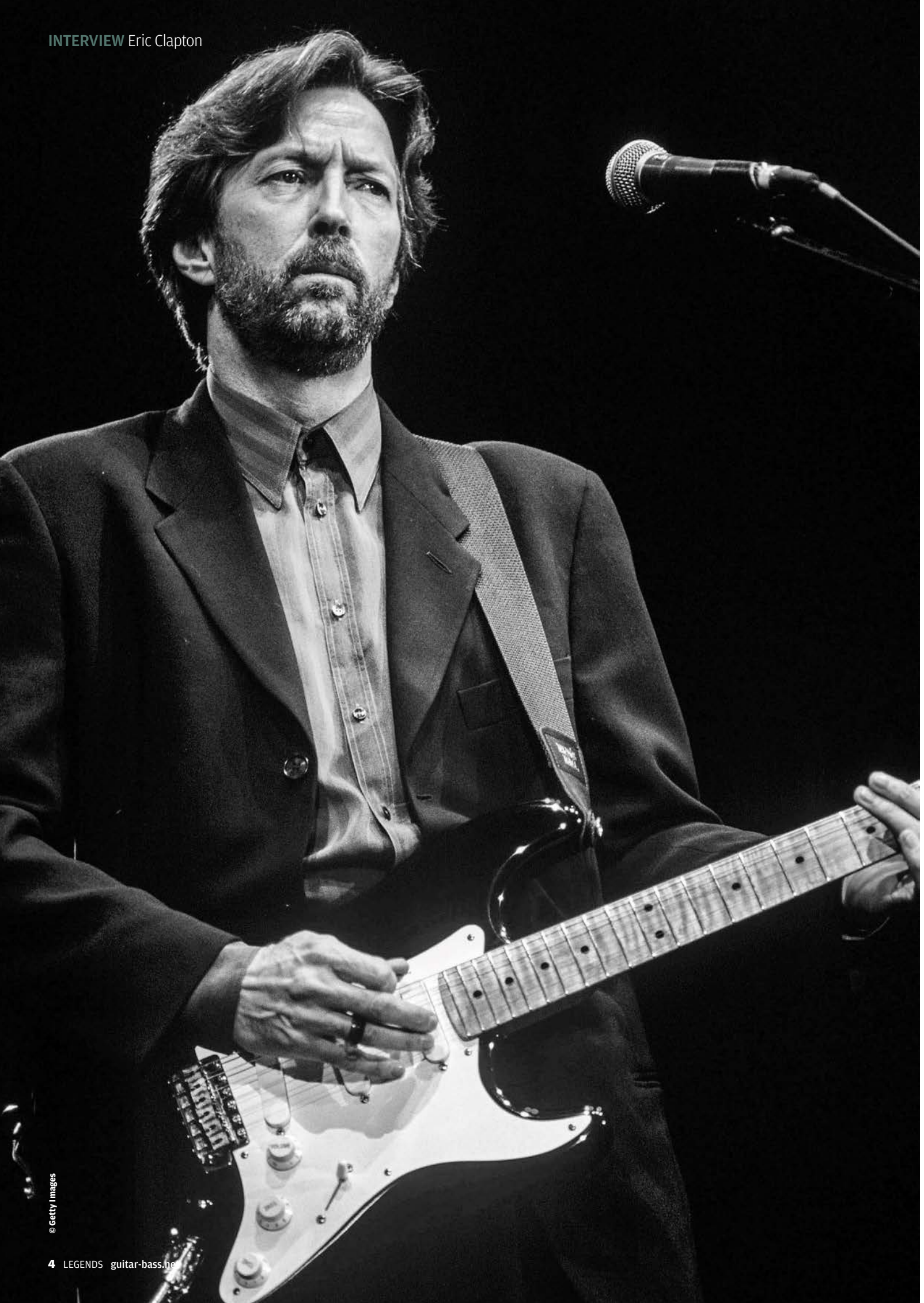

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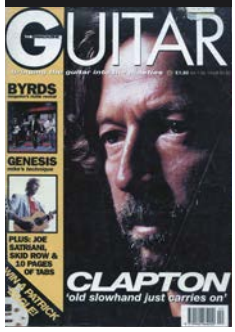

"At the end of the day, or night, playing music is still what gives me the greatest pleasure in life"

Eric Clapton is recovering from a traumatic year in the best way he knows – playing music. There's a new album, *24 Nights*, he's coaxed Geoge Harrison out of retirement and is touring the UK. Slowhand just carries on... Interview: **JOE JACKSON**

G&B **February, 1992**

Eric Clapton has never been so popular. For those who doubt this fact, there are sales figures to prove it. His last album, 1989's *Journeyman*, was the biggest selling of his career and he followed it up with landmark performances such as his 24 record-breaking nights at the Royal Albert Hall in late 1990.

Hot on the heels of that gig comes the double album, *24 Nights*. Produced by Russ Titelman, who has worked with Paul Simon, Randy Newman and Rickie Lee Jones, among others, its four sides subdivide into sets reflecting the different line-ups Clapton used for the gigs: four-piece band; blues band; his regular nine-piece band and most intriguingly of all, the National Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Michael Kamen. Stripped down to only slightly beefed-up 12-bar basics are Clapton classics like *Have You Ever Loved A Woman* with a line-up including Robert Cray, Buddy Guy, and Johnnie Johnson; while *Hard Times* and *Edge Of Darkness* reach sci-fi proportions.

And yet the claim that Clapton is now more popular than ever carries within it the coded accusation that he may have had to dilute his original musical vision – if not sell out on his blues soul altogether – to achieve fame of such epic dimensions.

> *24 Nights* features a four-piece, a blues band, Clapton's nine-piece band and the National Symphony Orchestra

Before approaching Eric Clapton, one is warned not to ask questions about the recent accident in which his four-year-old son was killed. On 20 March 1991, Conor Clapton died after falling from a Manhattan apartment. One would not wish to intrude on a father's grief, of course, but less understandably, one is also asked not to enquire at all about Clapton's private life. It seems like a telling dictate, fuelling the fear that his music now can somehow be seen as an entity separated from real life; that he now may be the kind of musician who creates his product for an ever-expanding market, rather than as musical autobiography.

But five minutes after meeting Clapton and discovering that in private, this guitar dervish is a softly spoken, somewhat self-conscious archetypal Englishman, one is ready for all preconceptions to be undone. Clapton says that *24 Nights* is a "memento" for fans who pack out his concerts and, maybe even more so, for those who can't make it to gigs like his annual 'party' at the Royal Albert Hall.

"Every time I tour around the world, fans come up and ask me, 'What was the Albert >

Hall like this year, how did it go?'. So this is their chance to hear for themselves," he says. "But I wanted songs that had that special atmosphere, good voice and good band and I didn't realise until I listened to the tapes how hard it would be to find songs in which everything did fit together during one single performance. There were 24 shows earlier this year and 12 last year and it was very difficult to get even the selection we present on *24 Nights*. Because I wanted songs that were 'perfect'. I didn't want overdubs or fixes on this album at all and there are none."

Addressing the suggestion that *24 Nights* could also be seen as a quick cash-in job, Clapton says, "That is a trap you could fall into. But I'm still too much of a perfectionist to let that go by. This was postponed for a year because I didn't like it first time round and we had to record those 24 nights, do it all again, to try and find enough for me to be satisfied with. So that answers your question! If all I was chasing was 'product', I'd have put out this collection a year ago."

Another reason Clapton is meeting the press right now is to publicise his forthcoming tour with George Harrison. "The whole idea is that George should go, with my band, and perform songs that he's been famous for for nearly 30 years, from the time of The Beatles onwards. But the point is that he hasn't done live shows for nearly 15 years. And, despite working with the Wilburys, he considers himself to be retired from the music business because he's so disillusioned with it all. But I told him that everywhere I played last year people were asking 'Where's George Harrison? What is he doing?', and so we started talking about doing some shows together. It's certainly not for business. I love touring, it's my favourite experience and I keep telling him that, yet his response is a cynical 'Really?'. He can't believe it, because 15 years without touring is a long time. And all the experience he had in his early days with The Beatles was bizarre, because they were playing for 10-year-olds through a set of, say, 40 minutes, knowing no one could hear them. Then they'd hop in a helicopter and be gone. And then when he did a solo tour 15 years ago, he lost his voice on the first night! That left him determined never to do it again. So these are the barriers we've to break down and I hope we do."

According to Clapton's long-serving tech Lee Dickson, Clapton's rig for the current tour with Harrison is simpler than usual. "We're taking the Pete Cornish rack and routing system, but only using a couple of units in it, the Tri-Stereo Chorus and TC2290." Eric has switched from his former Marshalls to two Soldano SLO100 heads, one of which is a backup. The current Strat line-up consists of three Signatures, two black, one pewter, strung with Ernie Ball Slinkys, gauge .010 to 0.46. Eric uses Ernie Ball hard custom picks.

Steppin' out alone

In contrast to his contemporaries, like Harrison or Keith Richards, Clapton's musical identity has always been that of a solo artist, despite the influential bands in which he's played. "I miss that element of being in a band a lot. But it's something I can't really do anything about. And the truth is that I really like being a loner. Because then, I have more freedom. I really prefer to be a leader and have all the freedom that entails."

Describing his work on the *Blues Breakers* album as "some of the most powerful I've ever recorded," he adds, "But at the time, I always wanted to make it clear to the people who bought the records that I got it from someone else." Speaking of Cream, Clapton reveals that he feels disinclined to dwell in the past, or get swallowed up by that beast called nostalgia: "It wasn't my idea to do the *Crossroads* set. Someone comes to me with an idea and I usually say, 'Fine, do it.' But the real truth is that I always need to be doing something now, something of the moment, not of the past. That's just how I am. Maybe it would be good if there was a Cream boxset. Just don't wait for me to do it!"

And yet the opening selection of songs on *24 Nights* is almost a Cream retrospective, including tracks like *Badge*, *White Room* and *Sunshine Of Your Love*. What does Clapton feel he can add to these songs more than 20 years later? "I don't know how much you can add, apart from how you feel today. The only way I can approach my music is by imagining that inside my head is a little filing system containing everything that's happened to me, musically, through the years. So, if you throw me on stage and press a particular button, certain songs are still songs I want to do. So all I can add to them is the way I sing now or the sound of the way I play the guitar now, plus the choice of musicians I play with.

> "The real truth is, I always need to be doing something now, something of the moment, not of the past. It's how I am"

Like the way the drummer here will treat *White Room*, or the way the bass player will interpret his part in *Sunshine Of Your Love*. So, although I think we stick to the core of the spirit of the original songs, we add an overall interpretation that is very much 1991 to me."

It was while he was playing with Cream that Clapton's sound moved beyond his interpretations of the likes of BB and Freddie King into a whole new genre. At the time, Clapton said that his only musical goal was to further extend his skill at improvisation, citing the then-influential example of Indian music as a format which abandoned conventional structure. But later, it was the emphasis on soloing that caused him to move on, though Clapton claims never to know where his style is leading him: "I don't really ever know where it's going. But I do feel that as you get older, you have more respect for your instrument. Also, living a different kind of life and not being into drugs or drink now, my focus has come back onto the serious aspects of what I do as a guitarist. People call me a purist and I think that's true. I'm very self critical and, as much as I try not to, I've got a very, very tunnel vision. I'm very specific about what I like to play and what I even like listening to. And, for me, musically the criteria is that something either has, or hasn't, got soul. If it doesn't move me, then I just ignore it. And as it was from the beginning, I still have to get a similar feeling from playing the guitar."

It's often suggested that the best of Clapton's guitar work was created before a live audience rather than in a studio. Similarly, on *24 Nights* there are moments when he seems to be attempting to burst beyond the capacities of his guitar: "That certainly is a conscious attempt to go as far as I can with the limited technique I have," he suggests. "And that's why, for example, I like working with musicians who challenge me in some way. I did a thing with Kate Bush recently and when she originally asked me to play for her, I said to myself, 'Where do we meet, musically?'. I love her music, but I can't see myself in it! I find that difficult, but it's good for me. Because I know that I will learn something from what they want of what I have! Or learn something about my own limitations in terms of what I can use in that framework."

Clapton admits he has no time for the American 'let's-see-who-is-the-fastest-dude-in-town' approach to guitar playing. "I've never belonged to that school of thought. When I started to play there were very few playing like me and we became the role models for the people that came after us. Van Halen says he learned to play by listening to my music slowed down! But when I hear his music, I don't hear me at all. So I'm afraid I can't be held responsible for that. The only time I feel I'm in a so-called 'rivalry' setup is when I'm with someone who is on the same territory as me. Like Buddy Guy or Robert Cray. But the great thing is that then, there is no real sense of competition. It's fun. I don't think we would ever play anything to hurt someone else or to make another guitarist look foolish.

"Whereas I know there are guitar players in the younger school who like to do that and I won't join in that game. So if I get up on stage with a young guitar player who wants to be extremely aggressive, I would let him 'beat' me, if that's all he's after."

So how would Eric Clapton describe his own guitar style in 1991? "It's inspired by Stevie Ray Vaughan, that's for sure. The album he made with Jimmie (1990's Nile Rodgers-produced *Family Style*) had some of the finest guitar sounds I've ever heard. And it had something to do with being on an amplifier very, very low – so you can 'hear' the string on the fingernail, almost. And I've been trying to play like that more. With the score for the movie *Rush*, which I've just finished, I've been playing very, very quietly, so if I hit a note and hold it with vibrato, you can hear it just sizzling against the fret. But not very loud. You have to strain to hear it. And I love that. It's different from the big, big sound people are more used to."

Edge Of Darkness, written for a BBC TV series in 1985, was Clapton's first serious and successful attempt at writing soundtrack material. An avid classical music fan who once chose Bizet and Puccini alongside Prince's *Purple Rain* to take as his Desert Island Discs, he also includes on *24 Nights* a selection of songs from the Clapton *Concerto*, which he and Michael Kamen will release at some future date. But as a guitarist/composer, Clapton is clearly most excited about writing for film. "It's something I decided I'd never make a living at because (a) it doesn't incorporate an audience and (b) it's too hard! But now I see it has a lot of rewards. It's great to go into a cinema and see a movie and hear your music wrapped up in it. I'd like to do more films, but I need to have the theory and technique under my belt so that I don't have to ask any questions."

It is while contrasting this style of writing with his approach to composing blues and pop songs (which, he claims, demands that he tap into his own feelings), that Clapton himself first touches on the seemingly taboo subject of Conor's death. "I was having problems composing of late," he says. "I don't compose songs, say, in a normal day. It's not something I particularly enjoy. In fact, I only compose songs if I'm in an emotional state. If I'm experiencing extreme happiness, extreme sadness or grief, then I compose because I have to fix myself. I compose to heal myself from damage. At the moment, I'm writing because I've had a very bad year. Terrible things happened, so I was forced to compose. But when we made *Journeyman*, for example, what was happening in my life? I had a love affair. Big deal," he laughs. "I wrote one song about that love affair."

Writing as recovery

"But I have started composing songs for the next album. There are already six songs which I've started recording in Los Angeles. The songs are about my son. I've three on tape and there are three more. And every day, I start to work on other ones. It's happening all the time. I'm writing continually, because I need to. This is the way I repair myself, recover from the tragedy."

Isn't Clapton afraid that however therapeutic writing songs about Conor may be for him, they may end up as too personal for public consumption, or that in releasing them he may, in some way, violate his relationship with his son? "That is difficult," he says. "Where do you draw the line? I don't know. My attitude towards my son is that I owe it to him. I've lost him. What am I going to do? I have to pay my respects to that boy, in my way, and let the world know what I thought about him. I don't want to make it a secret.

> "I only feel I'm in a 'rivalry' setup when I'm with someone on the same territory, like Buddy Guy or Robert Cray"

"I'll talk to anyone, anywhere about it, because that helps me to get over the death. And writing songs helps me. And I know that people in England, say, who are dear fans, want to know what I think and feel about Conor's death."

After the death of his son, Eric Clapton went into hibernation at his home in London. Now that he has resurfaced, does he fear he may make the mistake of expecting too much from his music, make it the emotional centre of his universe? "That would be disastrous," he replies. "But it is a possibility. I did find that when I made that tape of the three songs I've finished, I suddenly was chilled by the thought that I'm never going to have to play them anymore. And now I have got a void. It's like if I do make an album of these songs and just put them away, it will be like letting go of Conor. It would be a form of musical burial. So that, too, is part of the reason I have to perform them."

For all the tragedy that has befallen him, Clapton has no problems judging as "ludicrous" blues-nuts who believe that, like Robert Johnson or maybe even Stevie Ray Vaughan, he had to travel into the deepest darkness of 'the devil's music' in order to pay his dues. "That's a good little fantasy for young people, but the point about Stevie Ray, for example, is that he had been three years sober before he died," he points out. "He was living a great, honest life, being a fantastic human being. And he was up the ladder very high, musically. There was no one near him. That was my first thought. Maybe it was time for him to go, because he couldn't get any better as a musician. I'd rather think that than the Robert Johnson syndrome. But how the hell do I know? In fact, he could have gotten better and better and better. So I really don't think it's wise to try to summarise why these things happen. Conor's death or Stevie Ray's death."

Looking back at Keith Moon, Joplin, Hendrix, Morrison or even remembering the fact that two of the musicians who played with him on *Layla* are now dead, does Clapton ever stop and ask himself, 'Why didn't that happen to me? Why am I so blessed?' "Why am I so blessed? Yes, because clearly I am," he replies. "There is a reason, but I don't think I'm supposed to know it. Maybe if I was given even an inkling of why it wasn't me, I'd probably go insane.

"So the simple way of me looking at this question is to think that because it wasn't me, I do have a responsibility to express my gratitude for still being alive after everything I've experienced. And the best way I can do that is by making it accessible to people that enjoy it."

Looking back, does Eric Clapton feel he had to compromise his musical vision, sell out in any way, in order to become one of the world's most popular recording and live artists? "I have made compromises, yes. But I don't know that the popularity I have is a result of that. I hope the popularity is a result of a kind of consistent struggle to just keep going. The thing I hear most from fans who have been around a long time is that 'old slowhand just carries on'. And I do. And I don't try to change too much.

"The best advice I ever got in this business was when Muddy Waters told me to 'keep it simple' and to be true to myself. That's all I ever tried to do. And that's exactly what I'm going to keep on doing. And as for fame and money, they don't take away despair or any of that stuff, believe me. They can add to it, because there's a lot extra to contend with. The more people I employ, the more responsibilities I have. I almost have to work to feed mouths, almost have to put on a show because I have a staff of people who depend on me to do that. And in the process, I make money and I like to make money because I like to spend it. I don't have a businessman's approach to life. I don't want to amass money. I don't want to get involved in investment. But because I originally came from a poor background, I enjoy money.

"But I sure as hell know from experience that this isn't going to remove me from the emotional hardships of life. In fact, I learned the hard way that if you look to that for support and security and for love, you won't find it. At the end of the day, or night, playing music is still what gives me the greatest pleasure in life."

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"Compared to all the bands that I've played in, I'd say this is the loudest... I like a fair bit of level onstage"

Despite leading one of the world's biggest bands, Mark Knopfler reckons he's an underachiever. *G&B* catches up with the Dire Straits man to talk playing live, songwriting and collaborating with the legendary Chet Atkins... Interview: **DOUGLAS J NOBLE**

G&B **January, 1993**

"I remember sitting in a bar listening to *Telegraph Road*," says Mark Knopfler, "and I thought to myself, 'What a lifeless bunch of old toss this is!'"

As a highly respected and successful musician, Knopfler is more entitled than most to heartily congratulate himself on his achievements. Perhaps surprisingly, he sees things very differently. As he sings in *On Every Street*, "Every victory has a taste that's bittersweet".

"The jukebox played *Rave On* by Buddy Holly immediately afterwards," he continues, "and to me, it just totally eclipsed *Telegraph Road* and blew it into the weeds. Now, that's my kind of music! *Rave On* was bigger and better, even though there were only three instruments, and it was just bursting with life and joy. That was a real lesson to me and I think you can hear it on the last album."

Having just come back to London from Dire Straits' massive world tour, Mark happily reports that: "It was a lot better organised than the *Brothers In Arms* tour. We had plenty of time off in between legs and we tried to change things around a bit by playing different songs on different nights. In Europe in particular, we've had some really good crowds which take the gig to a higher level.

"I think we started playing better as the tour progressed, but the thing you have to watch on a long tour is overplaying. I found on the *Brothers In Arms* tour that people find spaces to fill in the music and when you listen back to it, you find everyone is doing too much. This time, we were watching out for it and as a result, it didn't really happen. I really don't know about whether or not you could say we have 'magical nights' when everything just effortlessly falls into place, but I would say that certain songs suit certain players better than others. I don't know how often that kind of 'transcending' gig is supposed to happen – if I'm finding my way across the fretboard well and if I'm getting a sound I like, then sure, things can definitely take off."

> "If I'm finding my way across the fretboard well and getting a sound I like, things can definitely take off"

Never a band for grand gestures or the massive stage shows popular with what he calls the 'jackboot' rock bands, Mark prefers to keep the occasion of a Dire Straits gig relatively low key.

"You have to hold back and avoid letting things get out of hand, but at the same time if you're playing a bigger place, you've just got to project yourselves a little more. It's not something we've pursued as a science – I >

think you just grow into doing big shows from playing them again and again. When I was a kid, the City Hall in Newcastle seemed a pretty big place, but walking into it now, it's almost like a front room or my manager's office. One of the enjoyable things about rehearsing is that you can find things to do differently from the album version – this band was flexible enough to do all sorts of things. Sometimes, if the arrangement on an album is all right, then we would pretty much stick to it. But generally speaking, I think on this tour we changed things about quite a lot, even *Sultans*.

"There were a lot of us onstage and the interplay between everyone increased as the tour went on – first, you find things to play off each other in rehearsal, then you find more and more as the tour progresses and the song takes its shape. People find their own parts better or find variations and the thing develops into something else.

"We didn't really have a single musical leader onstage. Sometimes, you have to take a groove from a drummer but on other things, the rhythm section has to follow the guitar. On something like *Heavy Fuel*, you just go with the drum beat, whereas on something with an R&B feel like *Two Young Lovers*, the rhythm section has to tuck in behind the guitars – two opposite situations.

"Compared to all the bands that I've played in, whether it's my early bands or Dire Straits or other people's bands, I would say this line-up was actually the loudest band I've played in. That can be difficult for the sound people because of leakage, but I like a fair bit of level onstage. If you're too careful about stage levels, then you lose a little grease – you've got to know that there's a rock band playing there.

"Terry Williams was the loudest drummer the stage crew had heard in terms of decibel levels, but Chris Whitten was hitting them even harder, going through drum heads like there was no tomorrow. Also, the way the stage was built, with Chris quite high up and back, made him hit the drums even harder than he normally would!

"People's monitors were pretty damn loud as well. You'd walk up to someone else's monitor and go, 'My God, what's this?', and a couple of the guys in the band have experimented with earplugs.

"If you're a keyboard player in the middle of a racket like that with a hard-hitting drummer behind you, a great big beefy percussionist behind you, three guitar players wanging away in front and you're standing on top of the guitar players' cabinets, which are forming your floor... Well, you're going to need a fair bit of level just to be able to hear what you're doing yourself. It took a while to get that sorted out, but we got there in the end. We had a phenomenal sound crew who've got a real reputation for getting things sorted out. Basically, we just dump the sound problems in their lap and they sort things out – we didn't even have to do soundchecks every night. If we were going to be playing several nights in a particularly difficult hall then we would do a soundcheck but otherwise, we didn't, even with a nine-piece band using lots of different instruments – Paul Franklin played three different kinds of steel guitar, Chris White played three or four different kinds of saxophone and percussion. Phil Palmer used a handful of guitars and so did I – so there was a lot of stuff to check! Plus, we had five people singing."

Setting me up

"I always start with kick, snare and hi-hat in my monitors, with the hi-hat a bit louder than you would hear it in a normal mix – so that if I'm playing 16th notes, I can tuck in to the beat. I used to try to make sure everyone got the hi-hat, especially for fast rhythmic playing when it helps to keep things together. On this tour, there was always stacks of rhythm because Danny on percussion was helping Chris with the groove, so there would be a mighty shaker there, or something else that would keep you grooving.

"You've got to be really careful that you don't cloud your monitors with far too much – I did want to have an overall mix of the band, but it ends up being a little bit tricky – sometimes it's best just to use someone's stage level for monitoring. After a while, your monitor man gets used to what every single person needs for every single song – which is a hell of a lot of combinations! Obviously, if you can't hear all the background vocals perfectly, you can't complain – you've got to be practical. As long as you've got the basics there and are able to play in time, then you're three-quarters of the way there.

"Songs always change as you gig them, especially at first. When we did the first Dire Straits album we had rehearsed hard and gigged hard, so we just had to go into the studio, set the equipment up and play. *Brothers In Arms* and *On Every Street* would sound very different if we had gigged the songs first.

> "*Brothers In Arms* and *On Every Street* would sound very different if we had gigged the songs first"

"Actually, I don't think any of the Dire Straits albums are all that good. *On Every Street* is the best in a lot of ways, 'cause a lot of the stuff was recorded with everyone playing together. We also had the time to get to know the songs better and do a bit of work on sounds and arrangements. But I certainly don't enjoy listening to stuff that I've done in the past. It makes me very uncomfortable."

Although Mark's often accused of playing safe, this criticism can hardly apply to some of his more epic songs, such as *Private Investigations* and that 'lifeless bunch of old toss', *Telegraph Road*.

"Yeah, I guess I was experimenting with form and length on those songs. We still play them onstage, but I certainly wouldn't do anything like that now – I don't write stuff like that any more. My favourite music is simple, basic, straightforward music – little songs, if you like – so I really don't know how I found myself doing all that stuff!

"I'm credited with producing *Love Over Gold*, but 'producer' is a very loose term. Sometimes, a band will be producing themselves, even though there is someone else's name on it. The term is very flexible and depends on who is recording – sometimes, producers just direct traffic and other times, it's an administrative role of signing session players' forms. Usually, I would think it's a cooperation between the artist and the producer – the producer brings an outside mind to the record."

Around about the same time, when Mark was 'producing' *Love Over Gold*, came a more demanding challenge – writing his first soundtrack, for *Local Hero*. "It has probably been the most successful sound in terms of sales, but I'd say none of them have been much good, really," he reflects. "It's a horrible business – I think they should have hired someone who can do the job properly. When I'm doing soundtracks, I think I just stagger from one crisis to the next! It's quite different from songwriting and requires a lot more discipline, which I just don't have."

Known for his silky Strat tone, Mark notably departed from his trademark sound for *Money For Nothing* from *Brothers In Arms*.

"I was using my Les Paul through a wah-wah pedal and I set the pedal at a certain point which got that particular tone. My co-producer and engineer, Neil Dorfsman, put some fancy little effect on it as well, but the sound was basically coming from the pedal being set in one place.

"I couldn't remember how to do it later – when I had to recreate it for Weird Al's spoof version, I just couldn't get the sound. Guy Fletcher remembered that it was through a pedal and then it all came together – we had the Marshall all cranked up, but couldn't get the tone until I used the wah-wah."

As a producer in his own right, Mark has definite ideas about how musicians ought to work in the studio. "I think the thing that's wrong with modern recording is that the

musician is very often robbed of his right to play with other musicians. Very often, people will find themselves overdubbing on tracks made by people they haven't even met!

"Something happens to the air when you are all playing together, and multitrack recording hadn't been around for very long before musicians started being stuck in isolation booths and there was no spill – leakage and spill are obviously a total nightmare for engineers, but I love it. When you find yourself in the professional recording process, you take onboard all the stuff that engineers and producers do and it's not always for the best.

"If you've got a suitable studio and a band that's good enough, then I think it's a good idea to record things together, so you can play off each other. The recording process encourages you to go for perfect performances each time, but mistakes on record start to sound good after a while. There are piles of mistakes on Dire Straits' records... but probably not enough! I could point out mistakes in just about everything.

"When I started working with Chet Atkins on the *Neck And Neck* album, again, we were working on a limited budget – I refused payment for the album, but I think in the end, we split the royalty in half.

"When I first went over to work with Chet, he had a bunch of guitarists come in from all over the world – I think I was the only Englishman. I had made enough money from music and I knew Chet didn't have the finances to pay huge great session fees. I was just happy to be asked and, in the end, we ended up doing a record together. Again, it was a home-studio thing recorded at Chet's place and we only spent a couple of days in a 'proper' studio.

"Working with Chet and other fine musicians like him really helped my playing – you're always learning when you play with good musicians. I like the idea of change – I don't want to stay static. I like the way I play in my heart and I wouldn't want to be anyone else, but I'm conscious that there's a whole world of playing out there that I don't do – it's bottomless, really.

"If I get a book out, I'll find something and make it my own – either by adding my own style, or because I couldn't play it properly in the first place!

"I'm left-handed, but I play right-handed. They tried to teach me violin at school for two or three years – right-handed – so by the time I was 15, I was into the habit of playing that way round. It has some advantages – it obviously means my strong hand is on the neck for a good vibrato. I can pull or bend three strings all at the same time quite easily. When I was learning the guitar, I used to play with a pick a lot – a pick is the biggest amplifier there is and not using a pick is the main difference in my style.

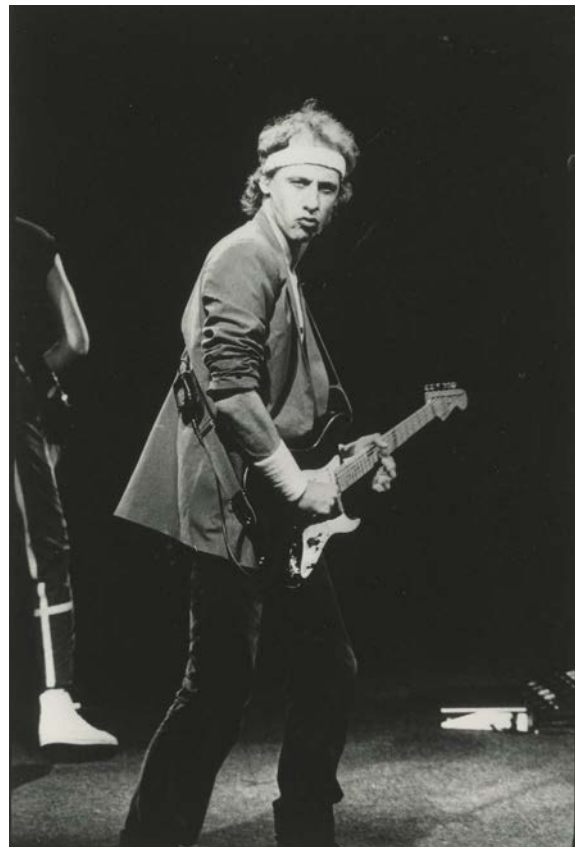
"When the fingerpicking style and flatpick style were fusing together for me, I realised I was doing things with my fingers that I used to do with a pick, but it was more comfortable and more rhythmic with my fingers. This was well before Dire Straits – I remember being conscious of the style developing when I was sleeping on someone's floor in Turnpike Lane. They had a cheap copy of a Gibson Dove acoustic with very light strings and I realised the pick was becoming redundant.

"I don't play all that much on the road, apart from the gigs. Inbetween tours, I get the chance to sit down and play a bit – I intend to work out more of a structured routine. I spent some time a few years ago getting some books out and studying a bit, because I was being asked to play sessions with proper musicians.

"When I'm working on a solo, I don't really know how it comes about. I think not being able to sing means the guitar becomes like a voice and you make it do things that you wouldn't do otherwise. Perhaps if you can't sing, you push a little harder with your instrument, but I've never really thought about that. There are lots of guitarists and musicians with tremendous facility, but they might not be musicians to me – 'musician' is a difficult term. There's a lot more to it than just technique.

"Van Morrison has great facility with his voice but not the same facility with piano or guitar – but that doesn't matter. He understands what music is and his roots go very deep into Celtic music and the blues. He is capable of great moments of fusion of the two – that's something that has little to do with facility or book knowledge. Having good chops definitely helps, but it's not the whole story."

"Not being able to sing means the guitar becomes like a voice and you make it do things you wouldn't do otherwise"



Country influence

"I think kids learning from transcription books is fine, but I think the best way to learn music is from lots and lots of old records. It helps when you're learning something new to have some sort of feel for what has come before. BB King wouldn't play the way he played unless he had heard Lonnie Johnson.

"As soon as you play with Chet, you realise you might as well forget trying to do Chet's thing, so I didn't have to practise especially for it – I just tried to be myself. Playing with Chet was a tremendous privilege, because you can steal things and make them your own. There's a little lick on *When It Comes To You* that I stole from him – we were playing around in open tuning one day and he played this great lick. He showed me it and I stuck it right into that song. One of the great things about Chet is he's got piles of these little licks. If you're recording with him, I would just wait around until he came up with something and then learn it from him.

"I've always listened to country music and I've been going to Nashville for years – that influence has come out more on the last album. They've recorded a lot of my stuff in Nashville and it's come to be more and more over the years. I've always loved country and blues and I guess I was listening to a lot of that around about the time of *On Every Street* – it just seemed such a relief from all the other crap that was being made at the time."

A man who clearly loves his job, Mark is no sooner off the road than he's back into the studio again – but some projects are apparently more enjoyable than others.

"I've just started doing the next live Dire Straits album and I'm actually bored out of my mind already. It's just basically listening to the same songs over and over trying to chose the best performances. It's miserable – I can't wait to finish it and do something else!"

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"I bought a cheap guitar... I fell in love with it. That's why I'm using it again now"

Over 30 years since he first hit No. 1 with The Beatles, Paul McCartney is still going strong. Here, Paul talks to *Guitar & Bass* about The Beatles, bass and the Fab Four's gear... Interview: **MARK CUNNINGHAM**

G&B **September 1993**

In 1991, exactly 30 years after becoming a bass player through necessity, Paul McCartney was honoured with *Rolling Stone* magazine's Best Bassist Of The Year award – the title bestowed on him almost habitually throughout the 60s and 70s... but in the 90s? McCartney typically shies away from such tributes. A few years ago, when asked if he ever had doubts about his playing, Macca replied: "Definitely. Often! Probably every time I've done a bass part."

Yet McCartney's contribution to the bass guitar – and of course, popular music – is truly outstanding.

He is, of course, the man synonymous with the Höfner 500/1 Violin Bass and it was his recent songwriting collaborator, Elvis Costello, who encouraged Macca to bring his trademark instrument out of retirement when they were working on Costello's *Spike* album. The one he now uses is the same one from the last Beatles tour, with the original setlist still Sellotaped to the side!

Originally a rhythm guitarist and occasional pianist, Paul assumed the role of bassist when the late Stuart Sutcliffe quit The Beatles in mid 1961 to pursue an art career. McCartney bought his first Höfner, a violin-shaped hollowbody in a shaded brown finish, with pickups in the neck and middle positions and a 30-inch short scale length, on one of The Beatles' early trips to Hamburg. "I'd gone out there with a red Rosetti Solid 7, which was a real crappy guitar, but looked quite good. Stuart Sutcliffe was leaving the band and he wanted to stay in Hamburg, so we had to have a bass player. So I got elected bass player, or lumbered as the case may be.

"I got my Violin Bass at the Steinway shop in the town centre. I remember going along and there was this bass which was quite cheap. It cost the German Mark equivalent of £30 or so – my dad had always hammered into us never to get into debt because we weren't that rich. John and George went easily in debt and got beautiful guitars: John got a Club 40 and George had a Futurama – which is like a Fender copy – and then, later, Gretsches. Then John got the Rickenbackers. They were prepared to use hire-purchase credit, but it had been so battered into me not to do that, I wouldn't risk it. So I bought a cheap guitar. And once I bought it, I fell in love with it. That's why I'm using it again now. For a light, dinky little bass, it has a very rich sound."

> "Höfner was one of the first companies with any decent instruments, not only the Violin Bass, but also their guitars"

It's surely one of the most recognisable instruments in rock and, with the dawn of Beatlemania, demand for the Violin Bass grew to the stage where the Höfner factory in Bubenreuth, Germany was unable to keep up. But while so many guitar and bass players of the 50s and 60s were influenced by other players in their choice of instrument, Paul had little option. "To tell you the truth, it was because I was left-handed. Every guitar I ever used had to be right-handed, because back then, they didn't make special left-handers, so I used to turn them upside down. But the violin shape was symmetrical, so it didn't look quite as stupid as some of the others did – for instance, when their cutaways were on the upside.

"I think that Höfner was one of the first companies with any decent instruments, not only the Violin Bass, but also their guitars. Obviously, my big influence was bass, but John and George had the guitars and, even though they weren't as good as, say, Fenders or Gibsons, they had a great, distinctive sound. I like it a lot – you play a lot faster, very >

easily. Its main problem is in the inaccuracy of the tuning when you get up the neck a bit. We've done a little bit of work on it – more on the bridge and stuff, because of the tuning problems – but not a lot. It's still basically original; it's still the same instrument."

Paul's earliest bass amp was a Truvoice, but by the time of the Beatles' EMI recording auditions in the summer of 1962, he'd switched to Vox amplification – a 60-watt T-60 piggyback bass amp with one 12-inch and one 15-inch speaker. In late 1963, Paul then picked up a newer version of the Höfner 500/1. It was essentially the same bass, but the centrally located pickup was now in the bridge position. Selmer, Höfner's UK distributor, presented him with a gold-plated 500/1 in March 1964 when he was using a new Vox 100-watt bass amp with his T-60 speaker enclosure – his standard setup through to the end of 1965. Sadly, says Paul, the gold Höfner was "one of a few instruments stolen from us at the time".

By his early 20s, Paul had become proficient on a number of instruments. It therefore comes as no surprise that he was the first Beatle to escape the restrictions of his allotted instrument to play lead guitar on a surprisingly high number of Fab tracks. In 1964, he bought a Sunburst Epiphone Casino fitted with a Bigsby vibrato tailpiece. Both George and John followed suit shortly after.

Paul first used this guitar for the *Ticket To Ride* solo fills, the slide parts on *Drive My Car* and the manic *Taxman* solo, which gave more than a passing nod to Harrison's growing fascination with all things Eastern. Paul refutes the suggestion that such displays of versatility may have aggravated his fellow Fabs. "If ever I had an idea for a solo, I'd just play it to them. The others were normally very supportive, so I just went for it! I liked *Taxman* just because of what it was. I was very inspired by Jimi Hendrix and it was really my first voyage into feedback. George was generally a little more restrained in his guitar playing, he wasn't into heavy feedback. I don't think George was too miffed. But when people say, 'Great solo on *Taxman*,' I don't think he's too pleased to have to say, 'Well, that was Paul, actually!'. I didn't really do much like that – just once or twice."

Ricky to ride

Rubber Soul marked the beginning of a major turning point in Paul's bass style. For many of the sessions, he took along his new Rickenbacker bass, a Fireglo 4001S which he had been offered the previous year, but turned down because of its weight. Paul took delivery of it between The Beatles' 1965 Hollywood Bowl appearances, and his basslines started to take on a new personality, becoming more melodic, more complex yet more fluid than before, particularly on *Nowhere Man*.

"The Rickenbacker was very nice, it recorded better. It had a sort of fatter neck, and it was much more stable – didn't go out of tune as easily. Also, it stayed in tune right up the neck; the Höfner had problems when you got right up near the top, so I hardly ever went up there.

"Although some of the stuff in *Paperback Writer* is the Höfner, so it did actually stay in tune for that. But it was a little more difficult to work with, being a cheaper instrument. I guess you pay for that precision."

George Harrison's *Think For Yourself* was adorned with one of the first, if not the first, examples of fuzz bass – the searing rasp courtesy of a Maestro Fuzz box.

Photographs from these sessions reveal that other off-the-wall bass experiments at this time included the use of a capo on at least one track. Although the Rickenbacker was beginning to come to the fore, Paul's Höfner was still the only bass used onstage right up until The Beatles' final concerts in 1966, when he used a variety of Vox amps, depending on the venue.

The mid 60s were formative years for Paul McCartney. His wider understanding of all manner of musical styles, prompted by the wisdom and encouragement of producer George Martin, led to a greater appreciation of what could be achieved with regular instrumentation, particularly the bass guitar. "On the early recordings, you didn't really hear the bass that much, but I started changing style and became more melodic. Brian Wilson was a big influence – strange really, because he's not known as a bass man. *God Only Knows* was a great example. If you listen to *Pet Sounds*, there's a very interesting bass – it's nearly always offbeat..."

And did George Martin contribute to the composition of any of Paul's basslines?

"No, not really. I used to stay behind at the studio after the others had left and work out the bass parts for the following day's session. I'll never forget putting the bassline to *Michelle*, because it was a kind of Bizet thing. It really turned the song around. You could do that with bass, it was very exciting. The basslines on *Lucy In The Sky With Diamonds* and *With A Little Help From My Friends* were good, too. And yes, the bass became more important – we were listening to records in the discos that had more bass."

> "EMI had firm rules [about bass], which we always had to break. It wasn't wilful arrogance, we just felt we knew better"

George Martin's engineer sidekick, Geoff Emerick, recalls how: "*Paperback Writer* was the first time the bass sound had been heard in all its excitement. For a start, Paul played a different bass, a Rickenbacker, then we boosted it even further by using a loudspeaker as a microphone. We positioned it directly in front of the bass speaker and the moving diaphragm of the second spacer made the electric current."

Engineer Tony Clark had the task of cutting the *Paperback Writer* lacquer. He remembers how: "When I cut it, with all that bass, EMI were very worried about releasing a single like that, in case the stylus jumped!" Paul affirms how "EMI had very firm rules about that, which we always had to break. It wasn't a wilful arrogance, we just felt we knew better. 'What do you mean we can't have bass? I was down the disco last night and I heard a record with that kind of bass!'. They'd say, 'Well our rule book says...' and we'd say, 'They're out of date, come on, let's move!'... We were always pushing ahead – louder, further, longer, more, different!" The sessions which spawned *Sgt. Pepper* in 1967 saw the studio floor at Abbey Road strewn with new, exotic instruments, some of which were prototypes given to the band to try out.

Bass-wise, Paul stuck to his Rickenbacker, now painted in a swirling psychedelic design, and used both his Casino and a new Sunburst Fender Esquire – through a Selmer amp – for guitar parts, the latter for his powerful *Good Morning, Good Morning* solo.

Paul's Epiphone Casino is one of several guitars he has salvaged over the years, and he still finds use for it today. As one can imagine, a vast number of guitars and basses have floated in Paul's direction since The Beatles, but unlike some of his contemporaries, he is not one to flaunt his collection. He prefers to keep his working instruments to a bare minimum, keeping the rest safely in storage.

Towards the end of the Fab Four's career, the productions were becoming simpler, less effects-oriented and at times, completely live. It was not unusual for the other Beatles to pick up the bass duties – often using either a Sunburst Fender Jazz or six-string Fender Bass VI with a Fender Bassman amp – while Paul played either guitar, piano or drums, such as on *Back In The USSR* and *Let It Be*.

In 1969, McCartney returned to his Höfner for the *Let It Be* film cameras, reminding us of its distinctive bottom end. "I noticed a clip of me in the *Let It Be* rooftop sequence, and you know you play differently when the instrument itself isn't heavy. You're tempted to play more melodic riffs and more kind of 'guitar' parts, really. I think its tone, for a little lightweight bass, is incredible, because it really sounds like a string bass sometimes."

Recorded between April and August 1969, the band's penultimate release before their

split, *Abbey Road*, featured a welcome return to the melodic McCartney basslines of *Rubber Soul* and *Revolver*. His runs on *Something* and *Sun King* often resembled woolly, low-register guitar solos, achieved through careful use of the Rickenbacker's string mutes. *Old Brown Shoe*, the Harrison number recorded in the early stages of those sessions, was treated with similar McCartney enthusiasm, his bubbling riff double-tracked note-perfectly with George's Leslie-d guitar. However, the band's signing-off piece, *The End*, was equally significant for its spectacular lead guitar triumvirate, on which Paul used his Casino to battle with Lennon's Gibson ES-335 and Harrison's rosewood Telecaster.

Life after Höfner

After the untidy break-up of The Beatles, and throughout most of the Wings period, Paul continued to play the same Rickenbacker 4001S bass used on many of the post-1965 Beatles recordings. The main exceptions being his employment of a Fender Jazz bass for some of the 1973 *Band On The Run* sessions in Lagos, and a one-off left-handed Yamaha for Wings' final album *Back To The Egg* in 1979. The latter included the mammoth *Rockestra Theme* – a pre-Live Aid gathering of rock luminaries which saw McCartney compete for bass space with Led Zep's John Paul Jones, The Faces' Ronnie Lane and Bruce Thomas of The Attractions. Further instrument diversions in the 70s included the original stand-up bass belonging to Bill Black (Elvis Presley's bass player), which wife Linda bought as a present for Paul in the mid-to-late-70s. He returned the gesture by playing it on her own Wings rock 'n' roll number, *Cook Of The House*.

It is interesting to note that while Paul stuck mainly to Vox amplification in the 60s, his 70s bass rigs changed regularly, from tour to tour. John Hammel, McCartney's personal assistant since The Beatles split, reliably confirmed: "When Wings started touring in '72 and '73, Paul was using an Acoustic 360 bass rig and Vox amps for guitar. But the '75/'76 world tour was another matter. He had a pretty sizeable rig there, with two Crown 300A amps and an Audio Master preamp, and these drove a set of JBL speakers, a Roy Clare 2x12 midrange bin and JBL horns. Later, for the last UK tour in 1979, Paul switched to using 120-watt Fender Bassmans and three 4x12 cabinets with angled speakers. Back then, he was also playing the occasional number on his Casino through Vox AC30s, and he's back to using them again on the current tour."

A live recreation of the aforementioned *Rockestra Theme* at London's Hammersmith Odeon in December '79 signified his last stage appearance with Wings. "Being my first band after The Beatles, Wings was always going to be a tough cookie. I don't think any band would have felt quite up to it. Once or twice, you know, we had a few arguments and stuff, like 'I don't like the way you do that' and... ooh, friction! Jimmy McCulloch was a great guy, a great little player, but such an erratic personality, if you want to put it nicely. Whenever we did have an argument, it was amplified because they were all so insecure.

> "[Wings] was all a bit crazy, in a kind of 'Spinal Tap' way... For some reason, we turned into aggressive, crazy people"

Inevitably, there were quite a few line-ups! It was all a bit crazy, in a kind of 'Spinal Tap' way for me. For some reason, we turned into aggressive, crazy people during Wings."

Indeed, the only other constant member of Wings was Paul's wife Linda, who now qualifies as Macca's longest standing musical collaborator. "I could have had Eric Clapton in the band," he reveals. "He's told me since that if I'd asked him he would have joined me immediately, but I wanted Linda, because I wanted to be with her. That's the way it was in the old days. You didn't have fantastically trained musicians around you, you just had a bunch of guys you wanted to hang out with. I know there's that thing that Mick Jagger said about 'I wouldn't have my old lady on stage,' but she's there, Mick, because I want her to be. That's why. I don't have to let Mick Jagger tell me what I can and cannot do."

Following Wings' demise, McCartney found himself without a regular band for almost a full decade, leaning on the support of George Martin, Ringo Starr, Michael Jackson, Stevie Wonder, 10cc's Eric Stewart and, surprisingly, jazz-bass legend Stanley Clarke, to help him in the studio.

While McCartney was inevitably crafting good tunes, the majority of his albums from this period lacked continuity. His bass playing, however, though generally not as upfront as before, was still as impeccable as ever. Studio-based throughout the 80s, Paul returned to his faithful old Rickenbacker, occasionally using a fretless model as well as Fenders. Still preferring the plectrum to the naked thumb or finger, his riffs were finding a new voice – grittier, smoother, but every bit as structured as his previous work.

He still had not returned to the musical stage in earnest since 1979. "The simple reason was that I didn't have a band," Paul explains. "I was much more nervous about playing the Prince's Trust concert than Live Aid. I only had half an hour to get the songs together with Elton and the rest of 'em before the doors opened. I remember Tina Turner sitting in the front row, watching me rehearse all these old numbers and it started me thinking about getting another regular band together. I'd pinpoint that night as the one that broke my stage fright – one that turned me around."

So in 1989, after much friendly jamming and veiled auditioning, Paul announced the line-up of his new band: guitarists Robbie McIntosh and Hamish Stuart, keyboard player Paul 'Wix' Wickens, Linda on keyboards and drummer Chris Whitten (now replaced by Blair Cunningham).

Flowers In The Dirt, the album which heralded this apparent renaissance, was notable in the bass department for the appearance of Paul's customised five-string Wal bass.

"Trevor Horn, who produced some of the tracks, came into the studio one day with his Wal bass – I liked the feel of it and I just had to have one. So I was using it quite often until this tour."

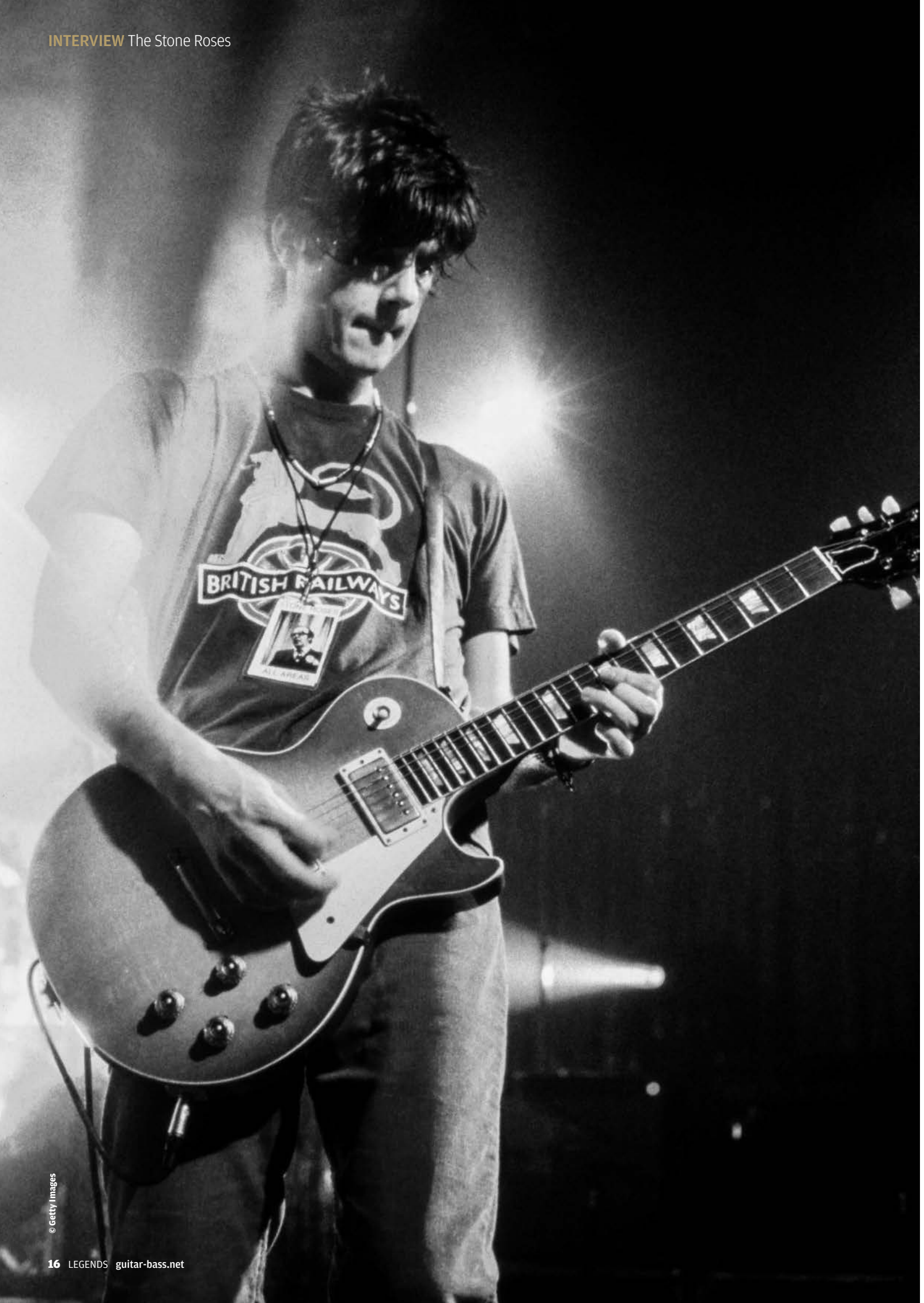
Popular opinion has it that the McCartney output since the advent of this new band has been his best since The Beatles. Then again, Paul has joked that "I'm the poor bastard who always has to compete with The Beatles!". Certainly, songs like the thunderous *C'mon People*, *Get Out Of My Way* and *Mistress And Maid* have a clearer direction, and two years on the road helped inspire the more spontaneous approach to *Off The Ground*.

And with his world tour touching down in Britain this month, it's reassuring to hear that McCartney still has a refreshing philosophy for playing live. "If you can play your stuff in a pub, then you're a good band."

At the time of writing, Paul is busy at his private East Sussex studio, mixing tapes from recent Australasian and US concerts for a forthcoming live album. With the (heavy) Wal now relegated to the subs' bench, Paul's faithful Höfner has once again become his mainstay, as he turns full circle in this 30th-anniversary year of Beatlemania. So what keeps him on the road?

"It's the audience, because when you write and produce a record, you do it in isolation – you even hear it on the radio in isolation. But when you get out in front of a crowd and they like something, it's very obvious, because they'll cheer or clap or weep or smile. You get the feedback and that's the payoff. They say that showbiz people like applause, but I think everyone does. It's like your boss saying: 'That's great, that's fantastic.' It's an affirmation that you're okay.

"The only thing that's ever motivated me – ever – has been a love of the music... The only difference between the audiences then and now is that they dress differently. But it's still pretty crazy. The crowds seem to behave like their mothers and fathers did in the 60s – and I still love 'em!"



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"There's tapes around of us jamming late-night stuff, bluesy stuff that would blow you away..."

Ian Brown, Mani and John Squire talk about the inspiration behind *Second Coming*, producer John Leckie reveals why he left the sessions – and we detail how The Stone Roses work in the studio...
Interview: **CLIFF JONES AND ASHLEY HEATH**

G&B **July 1995**

In 1990, The Stone Roses were a pop sensation. By 1995, they were trying to resurrect their career with an album of expansive blues-rock jams. By now, those who are interested will have heard the most eagerly awaited rock album of the last five years, read the acres of speculative rhetoric and decided whether they think *Second Coming* is genius or rambling, indulgent retro stink.

Given that it's five years since one of Brit-rock's best loved, most critically revered and enigmatic acts recorded, it's best we go back to the very beginning and readdress the question: Who are The Stone Roses and why should we still care about them?

Having released in 1989 what has retrospectively become one of the great debut albums of all time, the Roses promptly disappeared from the public arena, parted company with their manager, negotiated a multi-million-dollar new deal with Geffen and made ready to start work on the most expectation-laden album British rock had seen for years. Time rolled on – months, years passed – and there was still no sign of the record. By mid '93, news had filtered through that the Roses were, at last, in a proper studio with a proper producer bashing out proper tracks like no tomorrow.

> In 1989, having released what has become one of the great debuts of all time, the Roses promptly disappeared

This time the rumours were true... well, almost. They had been recording, yes, but in truth the band had achieved very little. 10 weeks into the sessions, their appointed producer John Leckie walked out in exasperation as the band incurred spiralling studio bills recording what amounted to sprawling experiments in abstraction (exhibit A: the four-minute intro of *Second Coming*'s opener, *Breaking Into Heaven*).

In November 1994, the world was treated to the power-slide guitar-rock bombast of the *Love Spreads* 45, but when the album arrived a month later, the band walked into accusations of arrogance on a grand scale. *Second Coming* consisted of 12 rambling, solo-laden mini-epics, only one of which clocked in at under three minutes. To most of the critics, the Roses had blown it big time. On initial listens at least, it was judged to be the product of a considerable talent in an advanced and wayward state of decay. Where was the pop suss, where were the magnificent melodies? The innocence and >

naivety that gave their debut its charm was gone and for a band of such status to trivialise their talent for crafting great pop came as something of a blow, to say the least.

Rock Roses

Arrogance should never be confused with self-confidence, according to singer Ian Brown. "To me, arrogance is looking down from a great height, despising, being a bloated version of yourself. We're not like that. They call us arrogant because we believe in what we do."

And as for the detractors who whined on about the album's rockist pretensions, cringed when they heard *Tears*' second-hand *Stairway* refrains and its Clapton-esque guitar wailing, well, John Squire is wont to agree with them.

"It's not an original album, but I witnessed all the influences that went into its making so I would think that, wouldn't I? I'd been listening to a lot of old blues stuff and to be honest, I found it difficult to accommodate those blues motifs and structures into our songs. I went back to the Beach Boys pop thing of simple three-chord structures and tried to update it. That's why (The Jesus And Mary Chain's) *Psychocandy* was so incredible when it came out, that it could be so modern and powerful yet could still doff its cap to people like Brian Wilson and Phil Spector. I went and mixed up those three chords with the blues and now I think I'm giving those three chords a decent run for their money."

The music that Squire has been checking out over the last four years has an unashamedly retro slant – though, unlike his fellow Stone Roses, he believes the current music scene is starting to pick up again.

"I was beginning to think I was sad, only listening to back catalogue, until Beck came along. There was a lot of Buddy Guy, Muddy Waters and Zeppelin played – which is what everyone's been saying the album sounds like, in fact – but I've also got round to listening to a lot of The Byrds, which is what everyone thought the first album sounded like! The bands that really turned me on when I started out were The Byrds, The Beach Boys, The Beatles, The Stones, Hendrix, all the usual stuff. But lately, I've been listening to things like Beck's *Mellow Gold*. I love the sounds and the storytelling." Roses bassist Mani prefers to praise the faceless sessioneers behind the great Northern Soul records as his main influence.

"To tell you the truth, I'm only just beginning to get good at the bass," he reflects. "I was learning when we did the first album and *Fool's Gold*, and I had to struggle to get through *I Am The Resurrection* because I wasn't confident or competent. See, we've all grown as musicians tremendously... It's a different band now and we've developed to the point where we feel confident about writing and contributing songs, not just sounds."

That the Roses ended up spending five years away, maturing as musicians and people, seems ironic in light of Brown's final words the last time the band graced a British stage, at Spike Island in 1990. "The time is now," he declared as the band triumphantly left the stage. "Do it now, do it now."

So what happened? At the risk of coining a blues cliché, each member of the Roses reached their own personal crossroads at some point during the past five years. Each made decisions about their lives, their families and themselves: Brown had a son, while Reni and Mani both now have young daughters; Squire went through problems around the time of a relationship breakdown and separation from his three-year-old daughter. The arduous court battles with ex-label Silvertone had the Roses in the witness box day after day and the legal machinations prevented the band recording or playing live for nearly two years. More recently, Mani's father died. Then there were suggestions the Roses were at war over the sharing of the corporate spoils. Bands regularly fall foul of the rock 'n' roll rule that some band members are more equal than others. And the jealousy tears some of them apart.

Mani sets the record straight. "I have no problem with the fact that John gets publishing, because he writes the songs. We're friends, have been for 10 years. Any fights we had weren't about money. When four boys get together, there's going to be the odd altercation – we're not The Partridge Family or The Osmonds, but we love each other. There was never any fisticuffs."

Typically, Mani prefers to point to the legal nightmares as the true cause of the Roses' early-90s malaise. "It would have been nice not to have had the two-year injunction or the legal hassle and to have kept the momentum going, but we needed a break after all that. We loved playing and touring, but we were getting tired and the joy had gone."

> "I'll never sing as good as John Lennon, but the band play better than The Beatles now" – *Ian Brown*

Or as Reni, very much a part of the Roses when this interview took place, put it: "These things don't change the way you look outwardly, but you grow up so much inside." For the drummer at least, the frustrations eventually outweighed the fun, as he revealed in one of the last things he said as a member of the Roses. It was suggested to him that the band, after such a long time away, were perhaps destined to underachieve; he answered with a guarded agreement. "Possibly. Personally, I'm sick of underachieving... I've written my own stuff, my problem is finishing it. The last few years I've been learning the guitar; I'm a very basic strummer but I just can't help writing songs. In fact, my drumming suffered, 'cause I was always working on songs on my four-track at home. I've got a keyboard and a guitar and you can play those at home whereas you can't play drums – at least not where I live 'cause it would annoy the neighbours. I've been working on some Gang Starr loops that I've put stuff over that sound great. I could develop those ideas. If it takes us this long to record another album, I'll have my solo LP out first."

In September 1993, The Stone Roses completed four months of writing and demoing, recording tracks live to DAT. Enter John Leckie, the veteran producer who can count The Fall and XTC amongst his credits, and the man who gave the band's debut album a unique uniformity of sound. The Roses spent 10 more weeks recording, this time using the Rolling Stones Mobile, which they parked outside the Old Brewery in Ewloe, in the Welsh hills. The results of these sessions were early versions of *Daybreak*, *Tightrope*, *Tears* and *Ten Storey Love Song*. The Roses themselves, according to Ian Brown, were thrilled with the results. As their tenure at Rockfield commenced, they told Leckie that this was the kind of sound they were after for the rest of the album.

"He didn't even comment," reflects Ian Brown. "But when it came time for the proper recording, Leckie said he didn't think we had the songs. We'd given him three of the best tracks on the album! I thought *Daybreak* was fantastic as it was."

After just one night at Rockfield, having been dragged there under duress, Leckie announced that he simply didn't have the heart to continue with a project that he felt was suffering from under-rehearsal, lack of spirit and focus. "When we first met John we were on the dole, and we'd go in and make a record in a day," says Brown. "Now, it's different. I was like, 'So time's money for you now, is it John?' Anyway, one morning, me and Reni are up at 8.30am and he's packed his suitcase and he's scuttling away. 'Not saying goodbye to the lads, then, John?' We went over and gave him a hug and told him there were no hard feelings, but it hurt that he didn't even have time to knock on the door and tell us."

All that remains from the Leckie-produced sessions is the complex, atmospheric intro to *Breaking Into Heaven*, parts of *How Do You Sleep* and some snatches of *Begging You*, the sample-heavy piledriver that hits halfway into the album. Rather than being angry or

dismissive about Leckie, songwriter Squire seems simply bemused by what occurred.

"He was taking us aside one by one and waving bits of paper under our noses. He also started worrying more about the money, it seemed to me. It was good in a way, 'cause it made us angry and you can really use anger." Ultimately, however, it was Squire's dissatisfaction with Leckie's trademark 'fizzy' sound, the cold, trebly manner in which he records guitars, that caused them to part company. "I'm not sure I like that saccharine and chrome-plated Leckie sound anyway," says Squire. "It sounded too neutered for the kind of record we wanted."

Leckie, for his part, maintains that it was the sheer lack of activity, the band's inability to commit anything substantial to tape, that finally drove him away. "My role as producer is simply to capture that magic take," he argues. "I'd tried, I really had, and contrary to what Ian says, I had no problems with the songs – they were great. John would come down from his bedroom, deliver them to the band and they'd be great, but I invested two years of my life in that record, on and off, and it seemed to be going nowhere. There was no discipline, no urgency and they just didn't have that magic take in them at that point. It was like a different band from the one that made *I Am The Resurrection*.

"We had two sessions with the Stones Mobile and in the first four weeks, we did three tracks and in the second six-week session, we did just one, *Ten Storey Love Song*. They just didn't have any life in them. I told them there's no point hiring an expensive studio and coming out with demos, so I said, 'Go away, sort yourselves out and we'll try again.' They were spending a grand a day and producing nothing!

"I was under contract to keep the album within budget, although I was never told what that budget was. If it had gone over budget, I was liable personally for the costs. In the end, it just got too much. There comes a point where you have to devote some time to your own life, other albums and projects."

As to the allegation that he left without warning, Leckie finds Brown's memory of events to be selective. "We talked about me leaving the album for a while; in fact, we had two or three big meetings about just that. I didn't want to go to Rockfield at all and I told them, but they managed to convince me it would work. I lasted one night."

Given that this was the most anticipated release in British popular music since *Sgt. Pepper*, it's hard to believe that Leckie didn't try, as he puts it, "to work hard at making a hit record". The fact that the album took another year of studio time to complete suggests that Leckie was maybe right in believing that the band had no real direction when they began. Indeed, if it sounds like anything at all, *Second Coming* sounds like it was jammed up from weeks and months of tinkering and experimentation. Given that Squire and co. seemed so vehement about the songs and the sounds on the new album, why didn't they just produce it themselves? "I didn't want that complete pressure of deciding everything myself," the guitarist says. "You need someone there to throw a different light on things – as a musician, you're too involved with it. I still don't really understand what a producer is anyway, do you?"

Future plans

Paul Schroeder came and took over the sessions after Leckie's departure with a sterling stint at the controls; *Breaking Into Heaven*, *Driving South* and the careening bar-house guitar boogie of *Good Times* all have the Schroeder stamp. Due to a prior commitment to producing his sister's band, however, he reluctantly had to leave. "He'd have been an arsehole not to go," says Brown. "Family commitments are important."

Enter the son of the Rockfield owners, Simon Dawson. Present at the sessions from the beginning as engineer, Dawson, almost by default, found himself in charge. He had grown to know the band over the previous months and had engineered much of the Schroeder-produced sessions, so his appointment as new producer seemed to be the most logical move. It's a strong testament to his abilities that the highly focused *Love Spreads*, among the last of the tracks the band cut, was recorded and produced by Dawson alone.

Given that the recording sources were so disparate (ranging from a 16-track Fostex machine to a 48-track setup) and some of the tracks were recorded with the full benefit of state-of-the-art studio technology while others were little more than fleshed-out demos (*Tightrope*, recorded in the Rockfield TV lounge using just a stereo Neumann, being the obvious example), there's a surprising uniformity to the mix on *Second Coming* and the album has a distinct 'sonic character'. This, Squire claims, is down to Bill Price – most famously, the man who mixed the Sex Pistols' *Never Mind The Bollocks*. Price provided a completely fresh set of ears and was able to sort the many layers of guitars which Squire had recorded, erased and re-recorded into some sort of order.

"I loved Bill's work," says Squire. "With *Begging You* he was begging us – forgive me! – to let him re-do it another way. He really struggled with it for the album and still thinks he can get more out of it. I'd like to get him to do a triple-length version and stick it out as a single, actually."

For all the critical brickbats *Second Coming* suffered on its release in December 1994, the Roses remain firmly convinced they're on the right path. "The best is yet to come," says Ian Brown. "No-one can get close to the sound that these musicians make together now. It's incredible to hear them play, better than it's ever been. There's tapes around of us jamming late-night stuff, bluesy stuff that would blow you away. They are unbelievably tight. Sometimes, I can't bring myself to sing because I think I'd ruin it. I'll never sing as good as John Lennon, but the band play better than The Beatles now."

UK audiences have yet to find this out for themselves, since the band's much-vaunted 'secret' tour of Britain was cancelled because, well, the gigs weren't secret anymore. But they're headlining Glastonbury this month, they have a new drummer, Robbie Maddix ("funky as fuck", according to Mani) and seem to have rekindled the single-minded determination that propelled them into our affections in the first place. Even John Squire, not noted for his high-energy approach to making music or his powerful self-belief ("I never really thought our first album was that good anyway,") emerged from the seemingly draining sessions with renewed vigour. He claims to have most of the next studio album written and is working to a target of producing an album every 12 months until the year 1999. The next album won't replicate anything we've done so far and I've got a list of songs drawn up already," he adds. "To be honest, all I desire is to make enough money to make another record. I'd like to make a live album though, something that stands up against The Who's *Live At Leeds* or *The Song Remains The Same*. We capture something live that we don't have in the studio."

But for Reni, there had been too much waiting involved. In April '95, he bailed out. His first solo album may be a long way off but after 10 years in The Stone Roses, Reni clearly felt the good times had already been and gone...

Five years, one million dollars spent, one lost drummer, one already postponed UK tour, no No. 1 album (even if they were only pipped by The Beatles) – should you still care about the Stone Roses? Sure you should. *Second Coming*'s dense web of sound slowly starts to make sense. Just as Clapton, Green, Page, Beck and co. soaked up the music of Robert Johnson, Hubert Sumlin and Elmore James, so John Squire has gone back to those original purveyors of the blues and, indeed, the whole 'crossroads' myth.

Combining this with the electric white blues legacy of Zeppelin, the Stones et al, Squire has arrived at a new white, British blues-guitar sound for the 90s, signalling the emergence of 'indie' rock into a more sophisticated arena. "People listened to the music and they wanted their heads blown off by it," says Brown dismissively. "That's never going to happen. These things take time."

It's useless castigating the Roses for just being, well, the Roses. Let's just be glad that – for now, at least – they're back.

© Getty Images

"By *Exile*, I realised the guitar wasn't a tool I could master, it was something I could spend my whole life doing"

Guitar heroes don't come much bigger than Keith Richards. *G&B* talks to the riff machine that drives the 'greatest rock 'n' roll band in the world'

Interview: **PAUL TRYNKA**

G&B **October 1997**

His own phrase is 'five strings, two fingers, one asshole'. But everyone else has their own description of the Keith Richards phenomenon, from 'the human riff' through to 'the world's most elegantly wasted human being'. Sitting after-hours in his New York headquarters, Richards displays his own distinctive brand of fitness, born out of nervous energy rather than intensive exercise. The famous lines are etched as deeply in his face as the photographs suggest – and they match perfectly the rips in his favourite denim jacket or the dents in Micawber, his beloved Tele. Keef's not knackered, he's just nicely worn-in.

His new album, *Main Offender*, proves that Keith loves making music, whether it's with the Stones, Blues musicians like John Lee Hooker and Johnnie Johnson, or the X-Pensive Winos.

"The main thing that's struck me about this album is how lucky I am that I've managed to get the same bunch of guys together again, because great musicians don't tend to hang around for three or four years. And they're pretty hot! There's not as many guest appearances as there are on the first one, but one of the things we figured from taking the Winos on the road is that you've got five guys there, but they all play three instruments, so you've got like 15 combinations. And it rebounded on me, 'cause I ended up playing bass again, something I haven't done since *Sympathy For The Devil* or *Let's Spend The Night Together*."

> "I ended up playing bass, something I haven't done since *Sympathy For The Devil* or *Let's Spend The Night Together*"

Richards has frequently said that he'd have been a drummer if he could have co-ordinated all four limbs, and his partnership with Steve Jordan defines the sound of the new album, just as much as his partnership with Charlie Watts delineates the elegant chaos of the Stones. The album is bright and live, permeated by the airy snap of Jordan's high-tuned snare drum, and on songs like *Hate It When You Leave* and *Demon*, Richards reminds us that he has a knack for classic, sensitive soul songs, as well as for vicious, simplistic guitar hooks like those of *999* or *Wicked As It Seems*.

Main Offender is miles away from the standard indulgence of a solo album. "In the Stones, if I stop playing, everything clatters to a halt. But these guys really push you. They're confident and they know their stuff enough not to let me slouch around. So with the Stones, I'll stop playing, go 'I can't remember the bridge' and they stop, because with the Stones, there's no point in going on. But the Winos will go, >

'Come on Keith, pick it up!' And that's what I needed, 'cause no-one's gonna kick my arse in the Stones. I can fit in that bubble very comfortably, but maybe comfortable is not where it's at. It's one of the few times that a kick in the ass is real good!"

Richards' ability to walk in a room, snap his fingers and work out if it will prove sympathetic to live recording is well known. So it's no surprise that all the rhythm tracks for this album were laid down completely live: "We played in one room together. The drums were always in the same room. We put some amps in isolation booths, especially the bass amp, and usually slaved a small amp outside so we could still do it live. And we used a lot of ambient microphones so we had a lot of room sound.

"For studios, I'm more bothered about the room than the recording hardware, because we bring in a lot of our own equipment. Basically, I look for the room itself, how high it is, what shape it is and what kind of echo it's got. And some of the time, rooms can fool you and you think it's gonna be easy... and the first couple of days of the session, you're moving the drums around. But when you find the right setup, it's great. So, usually, when I start, I walk in the room and say 'Are you going to be a friend or a foe?'

"I record without headphones as much as possible – usually, the drummer has to wear them. So usually, I compromise: one ear off, one ear on. Cans are a pain – you wish you could live without them, but you can't quite."

Richards is a master of recording guitars, and over the years has used compressed acoustics, Nashville and other tunings, and complex overdubs which always end up sounding simple. But those big guitar sounds almost invariably come from small amplifiers: "The stuff that sounds really big always comes out of a tiny amp! So the biggest amp I used on *Main Offender* was a Fender Twin, then down to Champs and Silvertones.

"Steve's one of these collectors, his apartment's a block away from where we were doing the overdubbing, so when we need an amp, we just go and raid the crypt, rummage around. We found this little Silvertone, this tiny little amp – and it sounds massive. We tended to do a lot of overdubs on different songs, so I can't say exactly what songs we used that one on, but on tape, it sounds fantastic. The thing with old amps, though – they're just like people! The older they get, the more opinionated they get about whether they're going to perform for you or not. I love those old amps more than my life, but they can be bitches.

"Try three or four Fender Champs and they're all different – one might have this extra zing on the high end, another's got this dirty graunch on the bottom. But that's the beauty of them, too."

The band master on Bandmasters

"For this album, I also used a Fender Bandmaster, which is halfway between a Bassman and a guitar amp. And I use a Fender Bassman, which is almost impossible to record, but now and then, when you get it in the right spot, it's perfect."

When you build up a recorded track, do you start off with a picture of the finished result in your head, or do you try parts out and see how they sound?

"I don't have a final idea in my head of how it will sound. When we start recording the song it's got the moves, the gut, the beat, all you can do is screw it up or make it better, so you start to put stuff on top.

"A lot of the time you know what the first thing it needs is, you know you have to put one guitar on top, so one thing usually leads to another. Once the song's out of the cage you grab its tail and say, 'Where you gonna take me?'

"I don't tend to think I've created a song, I prefer to think that they were there, I was around and I picked it up. From there, I could make it into something good. It's like being there and capturing it and hoping it will take me somewhere interesting."

You've compared your songwriting to being like a human radio, where you pick up songs out of the ether. Do you ever worry they might be someone else's?

"Yeah. Especially the good ones. I think it's not mine. There was one Stones song, even after it was out, been a hit and had been around for years, I was convinced I'd stolen it. Nobody could tell me where it came from but I was convinced it was a total steal – it was ages before I could put it out, I was so convinced it belonged to someone else."

Do you ever find yourself at a loss about what to write next? "Loads of times. Very rarely does a song come all at once. Half a song, snatches of an idea, but where does it go from here? You can reach an impasse. But writing with other people, more times than you think possible, he's got a piece of music he doesn't know what to do with, either.

"Mick and I have done that so many times we can't believe it. And a lot of the time, the songs will be in different keys, and I'm thinking, how the hell do we fit these together, I'm gonna have to change the key, and Mick might just say, 'Just play it' – you just stick them together – and it works!"

> "I don't tend to think I've created a song, I prefer to think that they were there, I was around and I picked it up"

With Jagger and Richards established as rock music's most enduring songwriting team, it's easy to forget that it was manager Andrew Loog Oldham who forced the two into a room together and told them to write. "We just wanted to be a blues band – and in 1962, blues was not a way to stardom. It was aimed at giving people a kick in the teeth and waving our blues flags – then suddenly you're a pop star. When I started, all I wanted to do was play like Chuck [Berry]. I thought if I could do that, I'd be the happiest man in the world. Then, when I found out I could do it, I thought, well maybe there is another aim in life. But when I started I'd dream of playing with Muddy Waters, but the only way I'd imagine it happening would be 'if I make it to heaven – and he makes it there – then we can play together'."

It wasn't long after the release of the Stones' first album that Richards achieved his wish; the band went to Chess studios in June 1964 in search of better recording quality than Britain's comparatively backward studios. "The weirdest thing was that when we met Muddy he was painting Chess studios. You walk in and start recording, on your hands and knees in this mecca, and they say you might like to meet this guy who's up on a stepladder in a white overall and you say, 'Who's that?' That's Muddy Waters.

"It was another of those slaps around the face. He wasn't selling records. And at the same time, he was a real gentleman. I would have expected a 'get out of here, white trash' reaction. But those guys were gentlemen, they saw wider than the music business. They immediately nurtured us, and had no reason to know that in a year or two they'd be selling more records than they ever had in their lives."

Although Keith's playing is perhaps closer to the spirit of Chuck Berry and Jimmy Reed than any of his peers, the first few years of the Stones output saw him move light years beyond his roots. Early Jagger/Richards compositions like *19th Nervous Breakdown* saw him honing the art of the simple rock riff, an art which Richards raised to its apogee with *(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction* – a song which, incidentally, provoked an early Jagger/Richards argument, Richards believing his own song was a one-riff gimmick; Jagger, band and Loog Oldham convinced it was a surefire winner. "Yeah, I thought it was a Mickey Mouse song. It was one of those songs that just comes in a dream, real easy, but I thought the fuzztone was just a gimmick."

No. 1 in Britain and the US, *Satisfaction* set the seal on the writing partnership, and also confirmed the band's movement away from the leadership of Brian Jones. Keith has commented before how Jones lost interest

in the guitar, experimenting instead with the likes of the harpsichord and dulcimer. Jones' loss of commitment – and later his death – left Richards with a void to fill that would inspire his greatest moments. A key point in this move was his discovery of open G tuning.

"That all happened when the Stones had exhaustedly come to a halt in 1966 and I started listening to all my blues records again and reading the liner notes, and realised, 'Right, he's using a different tuning'. So in that period between '66 and *Beggar's Banquet*, I started getting into blues tunings, Fred McDowell, 12-string and slide shit. But still in D and E."

At the same time, Richards had made friends with Gram Parsons, who provided a complete education in country music: "Gram taught me the difference between Nashville and Bakersfield – I'd loved the sound of that music but Gram took me right into the background of it." But although Parsons' country feel would influence tracks like *Country Honk* and *Love In Vain*, the one-time Byrd was "strictly a standard tuning guy". It was Ry Cooder, who came in for the *Sister Morphine* sessions, who showed Richards the tuning he would make his own. "I met Ry in 1968, when he was hanging around with Taj Mahal and Jesse Ed Davis. There were people like Clarence White around, too, some good guitar players! So we'd all pick stuff up from each other.

"Ry was using open G for slide, I saw him and thought, that's a really nice tuning. It restricts you so much; five strings, three notes, two fingers... one asshole!

Hot streak

"There's something about being restricted that opens up the possibilities. With a synthesiser you can do anything you like. I don't want to do anything I like! I wanna do something that ties me down, where I can manoeuvre. So I started playing in G without the slide, and started to find other chords and realise this was a really good vehicle for me. Especially 'cause Brian had just... croaked, it was a period where there was no other guitar player and I was trying to figure out what the hell to do next. Then I started to work with Mick Taylor and we really hit our stride, *Beggar's Banquet*, *Let it Bleed*, *Sticky Fingers*, then we had to move out, *Exile On Main St.* we worked together all in one joint."

Throughout the course of those albums, Richards would find his own vision, defining and refining the Stones' sound more and more. He was experimenting with Nashville tuning (in which the four 'bass' strings are tuned an octave higher – which, when doubled with a standard tuning, gives a 12-string effect), as well as using acoustics, preamped and compressed by a cheap tape recorder for rhythm parts on songs like *Street Fighting Man*. By the time of *Exile*, the Stones were recording in the damp basement of Richards' house in the French Riviera, and the chaotic conditions produced what many regarded as the Stones' finest work.

"Especially making *Exile*, I found this thing [the guitar] can do loads of things. It was there I really started appreciating the guitar. I thought, it's got so many possibilities, and I'm just tinkering with it. And I still am. But it was there that I realised that this wasn't a tool that I could master, it was something that I could spend my whole life doing."

> "Ry was using open G for slide, I saw him and thought, that's a really nice tuning. It restricts you so much..."

Richards has often commented that with Mick Taylor in the band "it became more like regular rhythm and lead guitar – it was much harder to get the Stones' sound". But there are many stories over how he was replaced. And was Ry Cooder, who helped Keith find his own sound, ever in the running for a place in the Stones?

"Ry? Musically, yes, I would have had him in the band. Personality-wise, no way. Ry wouldn't have fitted – and he was always his own man. I only found out lately that Eric wanted to jump in after Mick Taylor, but never did say so. But he expected us to call! It's like 'Why didn't you call me?' – 'Because you're too damn good – and you're your own man!' There's certain guys that are band players and there's certain guys that ain't. That's not a reflection on anybody. Eric's a great leader, but he's not a good bandleader. Eric's a chameleon – I love him dearly and he knows that... he's changed his hair again. And those suits! But if there's anybody lazier than me, it's Eric. He's got it all, but Eric's like Mick Taylor in a way, he needs to hire guys to play with him to kick him up the arse.

"The best playing I've heard from Eric in over 10 years was that thing with Chuck Berry, *In The Wee Wee Hours*, when he had a band kicking him up the arse, and he had to come through. And when he has to come through Eric will come through like dynamite, but a lot of the time, he's cruising. You can be good, but you're not gonna be good with a bunch of Yes Men. They might be fantastic musicians, but he's avoiding guys who say 'Eric, you're wrong'. You need a team."

Richards' obsession with keeping his team together has also caused its frustrations. "The 70s were a hard time. Especially when they kicked us out of London, it's very hard to keep a tight unit together once you've been displaced from your own turf. So our main battle then was to keep the band together and write songs when you're several thousand miles apart, rather than 'I've written a song, I'll be round in five minutes.' But then you realise that this is all a challenge... Nobody's taken music this far – and it's a voyage of discovery.

"I'm looking forward more because now we've got over that stopping and starting thing. There's no way the Stones would have made *Steel Wheels*, starting it in February and ending it in June, if we hadn't done separate stuff. You would've spent two months getting the band into shape. For musicians, it's practice. You can't take two years off. So early in the New Year, Mick and I will get together and see what we've got. Bill's another subject, though."

Doubts about whether Wyman will return to the Stones camp after the current hiatus in the band's activity have been circulating for some time now. At one point, it was even rumoured Jagger's solo sidekick, Doug Wimbish, would be stepping in. Richards doesn't want to see any change.

"Bill, I've got to see eyeball to eyeball to get this thing sorted out once and for all. I don't want to say too much. My basic attitude is the Stones are getting together and I expect him to be there, I don't want to see this line-up change now. My basic attitude is the Stones are getting together and I expect him to be there, but at the same time I know I can't leave it that long. I don't wanna hear any more rumours and bullshit. It won't stop the Stones going on. I don't know what we'd do. Maybe he's happy running his restaurants... I don't know. Bill's a very noncommital guy, which is why I can't talk to him on the phone. Charlie says maybe we could threaten to replace him with a chick – maybe that will do the trick! It's a drag when your family squabbles are in the papers and everything you do is a potential headline. My view of life is totally distorted."

But whatever happens, Keith will find a way of keeping his band going. And whatever mistakes they might make along the way – well, that's all part of the grand design.

"It could fall apart. It's a balancing act. But you can fall down and get up. I guess I got over my embarrassment over falling down in public a long time ago. That, to me, is what makes it interesting. You set yourself up for a fall, you don't wanna fall but you know you can get up.

"I really feel for new bands that are coming up because these days, you need a quarter of a million dollars before you can start. And with that big money, the marketing men want to play it safe. And when you play safe, the best you're gonna come up with is something that's not bad. And we're not here talking because music is *not bad*. We're here because it's *fucking great*! Playing safe is not what it's about. This music is all about beautiful fuck-ups. And beautiful recoveries."

© Richard Kalina

"I want to outdo The Beatles. If you don't want to be bigger than The Beatles, then it's just a hobby..."

Punch-ups... booze... drugs... bare-faced arrogance... In 1994, Oasis came from nowhere and established the perfect credentials for rock 'n' roll infamy. But behind the headlines, Noel Gallagher was fighting to prove himself the best songwriter of his generation. Should we believe the hype? **CLIFF JONES** thinks we ought to...

Guitar & Bass **September 1994**

Have you ever been really moved by rock 'n' roll, moved to the point where you feel like pissing yourself with pleasure, where that rising knot in your stomach tells you you're witnessing something that's gonna change everything? Have you ever been moved by rock 'n' roll to the point where you can almost touch its indefinable urgency and smell its pheromone potency? Has the sheer power of three-chord pop ever thrilled you to the point where you've almost cried?

Oasis have reached the delirious finale to a devastating 40-minute set packed full of pop shrapnel bombs. Singer Liam Gallagher stands motionless, radiating post-adolescent cool, staring out at the audience. Guitarist Noel Gallagher has his head down, cutting up the air with those dangerous machete power riffs, weird delays and snarling feedback squalls. Rhythm ace Bonehead is busy sawing away at his guitar, while bassist Paul McGuigan is doing his best John Entwistle impression, standing as inert as a mannequin, barely fretting those monstrous bass notes. Their now infamous cover of the Fab Four's *I Am The Walrus* crescendoes into wide, great arcs of ear-splittingly loud feedback, bouncing around the room, as the band depart from the stage one by one.

> Before you reach for a pinch of salt, this isn't just 'new future of rock 'n' roll' shtick and I'm not the only one raving

Imagine the Sex Pistols deconstructing the semi-orchestral mush of The Beatles' original, turning it into a *Pretty Vacant*-style powerchord guitar anthem and you might get some idea of the breed of Oasis's ...*Walrus*. Sometimes, it takes one brief moment like this to clear away the accumulated crapola of a million tedious rock 'n' roll write-ups and a million mediocre rock 'n' roll pretenders. Tonight was like hearing rock 'n' roll for the very first time.

And before you reach for a hefty pinch from the salt barrel, this isn't more 'new future of rock 'n' roll' shtick and I'm not the only one raving. Amongst his admirers, Noel Gallagher can count Johnny Marr, Pete Townshend, Bobby Gillespie, the entire music press and, most recently, Ian McNabb and Neil Young's grizzled old lags, Crazy Horse. Noel was asked to guest with McNabb/Crazy Horse at one of the band's recent London shows on a finale version of Sky Sunlight Saxon's awesome '60s punker, *Pushin' Too Hard*. It >

was a dream come true for Noel, himself a huge Young fan.

"I thought, 'What the fuck, this is Crazy Horse and I'm up here on stage with 'em.' I'm just this bloke who was on the dole a year ago and now it's all gone insane."

For his part, McNabb was amazed by the licks he heard falling from the 26-year-old guitarist's fingers. "We couldn't really hear what Noel was up to when we were up there 'cos it was so loud, but I've just listened back to the DATs of the gig and I was gobsmacked. Noel was playing like Peter fuckin' Green!" Marr has shown his esteem by donating a vintage Les Paul Standard to Noel, gratis (more of which later).

It's called the Oasis effect and, once you've seen them, chances are you'll be a convert, too – be you a metal-head, old blueser or grunge monster. What Oasis have is attitude by the yard and some of the greatest pop this side of 1966.

Stride away

For their part, the band seem to have taken such accolades in their stride. "We always knew it would be this way," says Noel, sipping his favoured gin and tonic in a London bar. "We're not going to apologise for being successful. If you don't want to be bigger than The Beatles, then it's just a hobby. People keep going on about it being overnight success for us, but we've been together three years, so if anything, we've got a lot of catching up to do. Some bands form and inside six months, they've got a record out. Well, for them the sort of success we've had may be too much too soon, 'cos they don't have the songs to back it up. S*M*A*S*H, Echobelly, Elastica and all them don't have the songs, they're embarrassed by success and they're so boring and dour.

"There's not enough humour in music. Look at Suede with all this 'together in the nuclear sky' bollocks. I'm sorry, but the Cold War is over, Brett. Let's talk about beer and fags and lasagne instead. Even Bowie had a sense of humour. He wrote the fuckin' *Laughing Gnome*, didn't he? Oasis aim to be universal. 'She loves you yeah yeah yeah'... that's in every karaoke bar between here and Timbuktu."

"There's not enough humour in music. Look at Suede with all this 'together in the nuclear sky' bollocks. Let's talk about beer, fags and lasagne instead"

Noel, it should be known, has very serious aspirations, in a Burt Bacharach, Jimmy Webb, 'universal songwriter' kind of vein.

"I wanna write songs that will stand up like *This Guy's In Love With You* by Bacharach. Songwriting, for me, is about doing stuff that your middle-aged milkman whistles as he delivers his pints. No-one's gonna hum a Sonic Youth tune, are they?"

As you'll have realised by now, Gallagher's theories and rants about modern music don't exactly err on the side of the conservative. While it may seem pointlessly bitchy, a bit of rivalry is just what the doctor ordered – the perfect pick-me-up for pop's frail, wheezing body.

Oasis were born in Burnage, near Manchester, three years ago [at the time of writing] when Liam Gallagher (22-year-old, doe-eyed, sharp-dressed vocalist) decided to form a band while brother Noel was away on tour as the Inspiral Carpets' guitar tech. Despite the backroom job, Noel himself had songwriting aspirations early on. Brought up on The Beatles' 'Red' and 'Blue' albums – "It's all there, the beginning until the end" – he began playing the guitar when his father bought him an acoustic and, by the age of 13, he was teaching his dad.

His proficiency was the result of a classic delinquent background, robbing corner shops, glue sniffing, bunking school, etc. It was while on probation that he concentrated on the guitar. "There was fuck all else to do," he reflects. He spent the late 80s following the Stone Roses around, taking drugs and going to gigs before taking the Inspirals' shilling. "It wasn't 'cos I liked 'em, but 'cos I had a talent for taking guitars apart and putting 'em back together. I got to see the world and got paid £400 a week."

Noel arrived home in Manchester on the evening of Oasis' debut gig. "The music was terrible, but they had something and I was dead proud. Bonehead's a solid rhythm player and our kid was a natural frontman." Of their inauspicious debut, Bonehead recalls, "We were bloody terrible and about 20 of our mates turned up and got embarrassed, but to us then, we were the best fuckin' band going."

Noel delivered an ultimatum: either he joined the band as sole songwriter and they went global, or else: "You stay in Manchester like sad c***s the rest of your lives". The band took the 'know all' Noel option and spent the next 18 months gestating in private, playing a few pub gigs to universal disinterest. "We were yer typical indie saddos," remembers Noel, dismissively. Still, they stuck to the plan that Noel, via his experiences observing rock 'n' roll from the inside, had worked out. They didn't send demos out; they didn't play every pissbarrel venue on the pub circuit; they kicked back until they knew they had a devastating set together. "We knew it would happen for us sooner or later," he says.

Via a Manchester band they were friendly with, Oasis blagged themselves onto the bill of a show that Creation Records' boss Alan McGee was attending in Glasgow. He witnessed the first song in their impromptu four-song set and, before the end, was hopping about on stage brandishing a cheque book, signing them the next day to a six-album deal.

Heathen chemistry

Another year passes... the band are now very good, demos do the rounds and word spreads, as does their reputation as hellraisers. The inkies run stories about the squabbling love-hate sibling thing that's at the heart of the Gallaghers' antagonistic partnership, even though it's nothing we haven't seen before: Townshend and Daltrey, Jagger and Richards, Ray and Dave Davies, Morrissey and Marr.

"I write for Liam the way Townshend wrote for Daltrey," insists Noel. "Our kid's cocky and brash, but there's some stuff he just couldn't write 'cos it's not in him. Our kid went to the Job Centre and asked if they had any vacancies for a pop star, so they gave him the forms and made him sit the test – but he got every question wrong and that's what makes him a genius frontman. He hasn't any fuckin' idea, but he's a natural, a one-off. It's a classic case of hating the one you love – he wishes he was me 'cos I can write songs, and I wish I was as brash and cocky as him and I'm not. There you have it. We can't ever say these things, so we fight about it instead."

The fact that Liam has a dismissive attitude to what the guitarist feels is his real skill also fuels their mutual angst.

"Interviewers ask Liam about the music all the time and I have to tell him to shut up because he hasn't a clue where it comes from. He might think he knows, but he did not have to sit up until 7am in the morning and write the fuckers. You get more and more drunk, you smoke more and more fags, then the sun comes up and you've got it – that's satisfaction. I don't want to get all poncey about it, but there's a lot of pain involved in writing songs and for some 22-year-old to flippantly pass it off in an interview just pisses me off. He can't write songs... he can't even write his own name."

Tales of squabbling, hooliganism, hotel trashing, drug-taking and stealing golf carts from Gleneagles Country Club are now part of the Oasis legend. It's a side of the band Noel doesn't deny exists, but he personally has no time for. "I can do without all this rock 'n' roll hooligan bollocks. I've been through it all before. It's boring and I'd rather write a good song than do a hotel room. Our Liam wants to be remembered like Sid Vicious and all I want is my name to appear in 20 years' time in an *NME* list of the 20 Greatest Songwriters Ever... then I'll die happy."

With the dawn of 1994, the band embarked on a series of packed London showcases and a national tour which had everyone who saw them fumbling for adjectives. Then came their first real test, the debut single, *Supersonic*. "We'd have looked like mouthy c***s if we hadn't made the charts, but it did and it was a great record," says Noel recalling the relief of their first hit.

So they play *Top Of The Pops* in a *Ready, Steady, Go!* manner and follow it up by launching a 12-bar called *Shakermaker* into the charts. Their first trip to the US is a resounding success, the *New York Times* commenting, "Every song sounds like a bona fide classic" – and this is before anything by Oasis has even been released Stateside. The band's debut album, *Definitely Maybe* (produced by themselves, Owen Morris and Mark Coyle, recorded, re-recorded and recorded again until they felt they'd got as close to the live sound as they could), arrives this month and we're more or less up to date.

Definitely Maybe stands as one of those great but all-too-rare debut pop albums. Almost perfection: something like listening to the Pistols playing the Lennon and McCartney songbook while The Smiths and The Stone Roses are hovering about in the background. Oasis may never make another record as good as this, but that is now irrelevant. Like The New York Dolls' and Television's debuts, the mere arrival of *Definitely Maybe* has caused a major rethink on planet pop.

"I know it's a great record," says Noel, characteristically enthusiastic. "We worked hard. But it's only the beginning – I've got another six songs as good as *Supersonic* and that's one of the great pop singles of our age. Singles make great bands, not albums. When you think The Smiths put out *How Soon Is Now*, *The Draize Train* and *Jeane* as B-sides to singles, then you really begin to notice the difference between the great bands and the average ones. Our album is 10 great pop singles... and a bit of a sloppy ballad for balance." The songs themselves pilfer from rock's great treasure chest of past masters with unabashed abandon. A case of 'rip it off and start again'.

"Guitars have six strings, 12 frets, 36 basic chords – it's all been done before. If you can't accept that, then music comes to an end and you might as well fuck off and play *Sonic The Hedgehog*. Go for the obvious, go for the easy melody. *Hey Jude* is McCartney's cheap shot; *Let It Be* is a cheap shot... but both are great songs."

Standing on the shoulder of giants

This neat theory is borne out by almost every track Oasis play, from the singles *Supersonic* and *Shakermaker* (with its 12-bar predictability and blatant theft of the New Seekers' *I'd Like To Teach The World To Sing*) to *Cigarettes And Alcohol* and *Slide Away* from the album – the latter sees Noel exorcising his Neil Young fixation, coming on like an unadulterated but sophisticated trip into the realms of *Cortez The Killer*. "It's never really a rip off, more of a sampling of the mood," he adds defensively.

> Oasis may never make another record as good as this, but that is now irrelevant... *Definitely Maybe* has caused a major rethink on planet pop

Some more anal music critics have jabbed their fingers at Oasis' magpie approach, commenting how *Cigarettes And Alcohol* is just T. Rex's *Get It On*. Noel rises to the challenge, commenting that behind every great band in history, there's been a songwriter with tea-leaf tendencies. "To those people, I say, 'You've got us sussed, mate. It's T. Rex alright, but it's the best song Marc Bolan never wrote!' Bolan was ripping off Howlin' Wolf when he did *Get It On* anyway and even if he had written *Cigarettes And Alcohol*, it would have had lyrics about pixies and shit, so count yourself lucky."

Despite these easy comparisons, ultimately, Oasis transcend them all. They're not the next Beatles, nor the next Pistols nor even the next Stone Roses... they're the first Oasis. Noel puts it in context, making the point that while he has influences, he doesn't reserve any sacred reverence for his heroes.

"Being influenced by people is all well and good, but you've got to want to outdo 'em. I want to outdo The Beatles. I don't have too many gods, 'cos otherwise, you'd get fuck all done and besides, it's all just building on the past, that's how you get to the future. The Beatles write *Helter Skelter*, The Stooges and the MC5 hear that and do *I Wanna Be Your Dog* and *Sister Anne*, the Pistols hear that and you get punk, then come The Smiths, the Roses and now us."

Familiar to millions

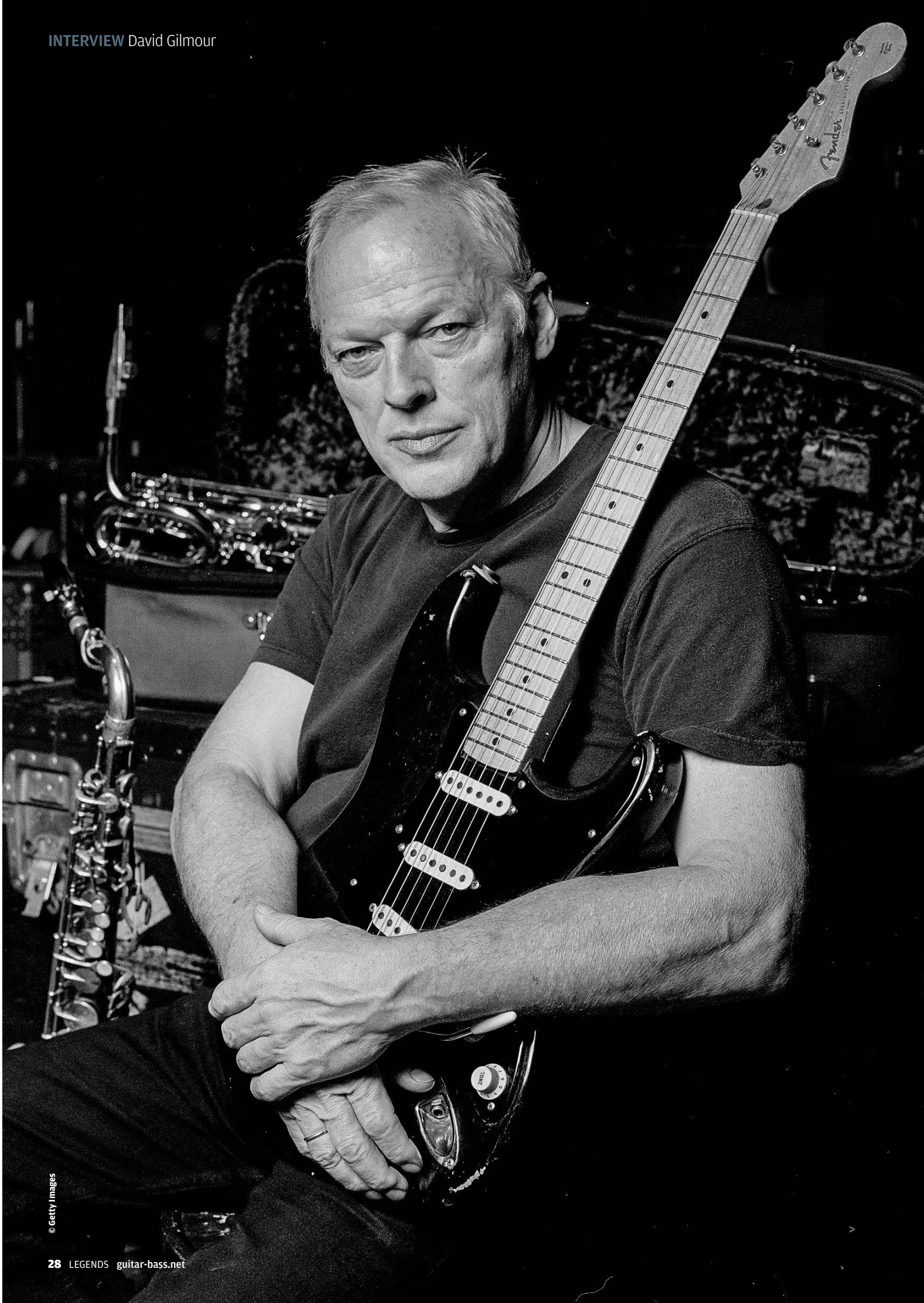
A conveniently self-reverential encapsulation of pop history that could well be true. At any rate, it puts The Beatles firmly at the top of the pile as grandpappies of the Oasis sound. For this band, The Beatles are, simply put, the essence, the thing they aspire to. "You can't knock The Beatles. Sonic Youth have been trying to do *Helter Skelter* for years and The Beatles did it 25 years ago!"

Noel says his proudest moment, aside from linking up with Crazy Horse, came when the band played a pub gig and something brought the whole Beatles/Oasis connection home. "This 50-year-old bloke was stood at the back with his wife. He had a great big droopy 'tache and was supping a pint. They turn up backstage and this bloke says, "I lived to hear *I Am The Walrus* live, I can die happy now."

So there you have it: Oasis, the best new thing in guitar pop and considerably more likely to make old men happy than The Bootleg Beatles. They fight, they take drugs, they're sometimes silly hooligans with a penchant for hotel demolition, but behind all the chemically fuelled foolery is a band hopelessly in love with music, songs and the pop ethic.

"I'm a loner," concludes Noel. "I live in my own world and in that world, the only thing that really matters is music. If the devil popped up tomorrow and said it's a straight choice between music and relationships – be it mum, girlfriend, or even Liam – I'd sign on the dotted line."

Every generation kicks a bona-fide hero or two up the pop charts, a group who come to embody not just pop fadism but the spirit and aspirations of an age. As The Stone Roses were to the end of the 80s, Oasis will be to the mid-90s. They embody the notion that we've reached the point where the spirit of 60s psychedelic mod pop can cohabit with the spirit of punk in perfect harmony. Perhaps The New Seekers were right.



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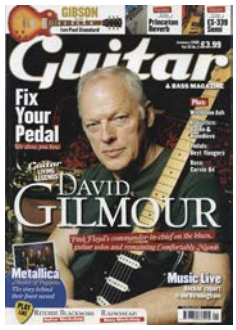

"I want people to get a tenth of the pleasure I get from making music and putting it together"

After a flurry of activity – a solo LP, a stunning series of concerts, the *Live At Gdansk* and *Remember That Night* DVDs – David Gilmour takes stock of four years of work. Interview: **EDWIN AMMERLAAN/IFA**

G&B **January 2009**

A true legend he may be, but Pink Floyd guitarist David Gilmour is a modest, quiet Englishman who's rarely in the mood for the kind of navel-gazing required when the press come a-calling. Past glories mean little to him: this is one musician who prefers to stand behind his Black Strat and let his music do the talking.

Our interview took place a short while before Pink Floyd keyboard player Richard Wright's sad passing. Even before this, however, the odds were heavily against a Pink Floyd reunion. Their Live 8 appearance in 2005, complete with Roger Waters, fuelled much hope and rumours flew around about the stupendous sums of money supposedly being offered to the band to tour.

However, Gilmour has always been lukewarm, at best, regarding the whole idea of waltzing down memory lane – although, in June 2008, he did make a glorious contribution to an *Atom Heart Mother* spectacular that included a complete rendition of the album (despite the fact that he once described parts of the 1970 album as "absolute crap").

Gilmour's main focus for the past few years has been his solo work, including the chart-topping album *On An Island*, as well as the recently released *Live In Gdansk*, documenting the last concert of the *On An Island* tour, backed by the Polish Baltic Philharmonic Orchestra. As well as being a Gilmour tour de force, the show at the shipyard celebrated Poland's 1980 Solidarity political revolution (the DVD also features a meeting between Gilmour and Solidarity union leader Lech Walesa). And it's the subject of that Gdansk concert that kicks off proceedings as, with a fine cup of tea within reach, Gilmour gets himself comfortable aboard his Astoria houseboat/recording studio moored on a tranquil stretch of the River Thames.

> "I think my personal message comes out best when I'm playing my guitar and singing"

Right at the beginning of the *Live In Gdansk* documentary, you say: "This is the memorial to the 16 men who were shot", and then... nothing. How did you find a balance between the political and the personal? "I wasn't really trying to make a political message of out any of this stuff. I think my personal message comes out best when I'm playing my guitar and singing. I feel funny when you take part in something like that. It's got nothing to do with me. I was thrilled to be there. They invited me to come and play in Gdansk and go to the memorial. I have a great deal of respect for it all, but it's not really my story. I wasn't one of the people that it made a huge difference to, and

I certainly don't want to jump on someone else's bandwagon for gain."

Maybe that's why the meeting with Lech Walesa seemed to be a bit uncomfortable? "They were celebrating and I was asked to be a part of that celebration, which I was happy and honoured to do. The world is still changing. It was very nice and thrilling to meet this man who was so moved and angry by the lack of freedom. He could voice it so well and he could get all these people moving. He forced changes against the will of the entire Soviet Eastern Bloc. What can I say to a man who has changed the world? 'Congratulations, you done good, boy'? I'm out of my depth, to be honest."

Did political implications ever withhold you from playing somewhere? "Well, we never played in South Africa when it was a racially segregated country. It has to be said that most of the places that would be involved in that sort of discussion were so far away and on their own that they wouldn't be financially viable. I've never been keen on wasting a lot of money to go somewhere to make some political point."

Have you ever used your status as a famous artist for political reasons? "There are certain charitable political things. I'm quite happy to state my political preferences and biases."

But you're no Bono... "No, I'm not gifted with that conviction that one thing is right and another thing is completely wrong. I don't have the gift that Geldof and Bono seem to have. If they do any good, all power to them. I have no objection to people stating their politics within their music, and they can do that as subtly or as unsubtly as they want. Sometimes, when it's not so subtle, it loses its effect and its power. But we are at liberty to do whatever the fuck we want with the gift that we are given."

You've never wanted to surround yourself with the mystique of being a rock star... "I just walk through life my way. And 'my way' is to be naturally fairly private – but not ridiculously so. I want to be able to be a part of the real world. I want to be able to go to the supermarket and buy my food and do all the sort of things that any other person would do. There comes a point within stardom where that starts to become very difficult, but I figure if you just keep doing it, you'll be alright and it won't matter very much. But surely, for Paul McCartney, it will be much harder than it is for me.

"As a well-known musician, being part of many people's ordinary lives can be a humbling experience as well. It's a fine line that one walks. Obviously, I would like to be seen as being marvellously talented! At the same time, I want to appear to be one of the so-called 'people'. I'm in a rarified atmosphere, but I try to keep that down as far as I can."

Is this down-to-earth approach down to your own particular upbringing? "Maybe, yeah. I come from a family who took left-leaning newspapers and were in education. My parents both met at Cambridge University. Both were interested in art. I'm sure my upbringing had some influence on me. I look more like my father. He was more closed down than I am; I can see I have the possibility be a little closed-in, as well. Seeing him to be like that helped me be less like that."

> "For me, when I'm feeling my most inspired on stage, I'll go a long way away from the solo on the record"

Can anything still boost your ego? "The best thing for one's ego is doing a great show and having the audience clapping and cheering at the end. There's more that I want to do, but there's no specific target that I can pin down. I still think I've got more to prove. One's security in all these things is never absolute. I want people to listen to the music that I make. I want them to get a tenth of the pleasure I've had out of making it and putting it all together. There are moments when you make a record, you come across notes or find a piece of music that comes out of the air, and you get it to sound really nice in the studio and you've done everything right, and you go and think: 'That's so fucking brilliant!' And you'll say 'thank you' to whatever higher being has guided it towards you. I want to feel that the public, the other people in this world who are capable of feeling those same emotions, would get a bit of that emotion by listening to the music that I make."

And the other way around, is there still any music that brings tears to your eyes? "Not very much these days. Only my own, recently. But then, I don't listen to an awful lot of music any more. Life is too busy. When I was a teenager and in my 20s, I had very little to do except listen to music. My children are obsessed with music in the way I was when I was that age. Sometimes, I think I'm jaded, that nothing is going to turn me on any more... and then I go and see Leonard Cohen in London and realise, no, I'm still capable of being moved. But most of the time, it just happens when I'm listening to my own stuff. When I'm at home, listening with [wife] Polly to it on a good speaker system. Listening to *The Blue* from my last album, for example; although I don't want to brag, I really have moments thinking: 'That's just brilliant!'. I wish I could make a record where every single moment of every single song did that to me."

There's a theory among Prince fans that the way he plays the guitar solo in *Purple Rain* will show whether or not it's going to be a special night. Can people can get similar indicators from your performances? "Yes. For me, when I'm feeling my most inspired on stage, I'll go a long way away from the solo on the record. If I'm not feeling inspired, I'll go safer and safer and closer to the way I played it on record. If you hear me play a solo that's the same as the record, I'm not feeling that inspired."

What happens at moments like that? Does your mind wander off? "I'm very professional. I try to keep my mind on what I'm doing. It's actually quite easy not to do that, to be playing a song and to be thinking about washing the car, but I've trained myself to try and get back in focus. Those people haven't paid all that money for me to be thinking about tomorrow's groceries."

The solo in *Comfortably Numb* is regarded as one of your best, but on the live album, the solos in *Castellorizon* and *The Blue* are easily up there with your finest... "Maybe I've done the solo in *Comfortably Numb* too many times. It's hard not to feel jaded when you play that solo. Still, you're always trying to be brave, to break out and do something different with it."

Most people think of you as a progressive-rock hero, but there's always been a blues aspect to your guitar playing as well... "Well, I had a lot of blues records when I was young. Blues is a distinct and large part of my influence, yes, but all sorts of other things are as well. My last album, *On An Island*, is a blues album – my sort of blues. The blues is really black American folk. I'm a poor white boy from England. Well, not so poor... but at least trying to express myself the best way I can. And that's what the blues is about. I don't want to restrict myself to a 12-bar form or anything like that."

Finally, do you have any plans to make a new solo album? "It's not in the system... yet. These projects come into the public's consciousness for a very limited time. The album came out in March 2006; six months later, I did the last concert in Gdansk, and then it's a wrap. Then I disappear for a while, the DVD comes out, but in general, it was four years of solid work."

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